

NAG

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[WE FLY TO THE BIG APPLE TO MEET THE BIG APE]



c:\ There is supposed to be a Cover DVD inside the bag this magazine came in. If you didn't get it - you don't have it...

KING KONG: <INSERT APE JOKE HERE> ◀◀

DUNGEON SIEGE II REVIEW ◀◀

GAMING NOTEBOOKS ROUNDED UP AND STARED AT ◀◀

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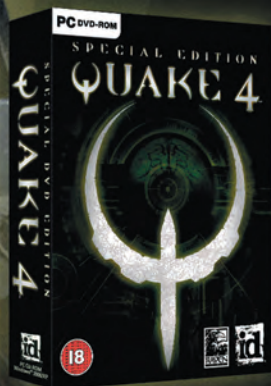
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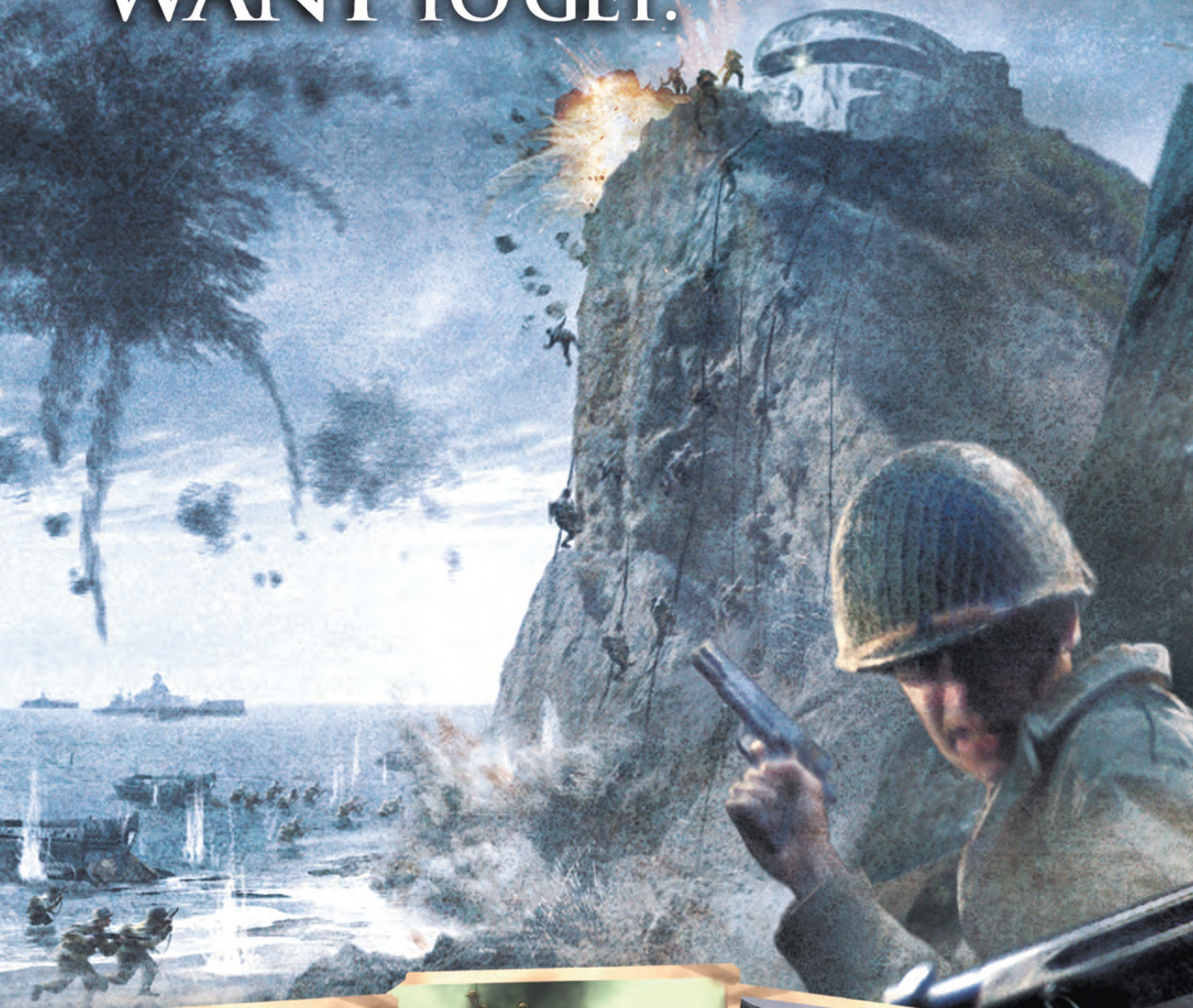
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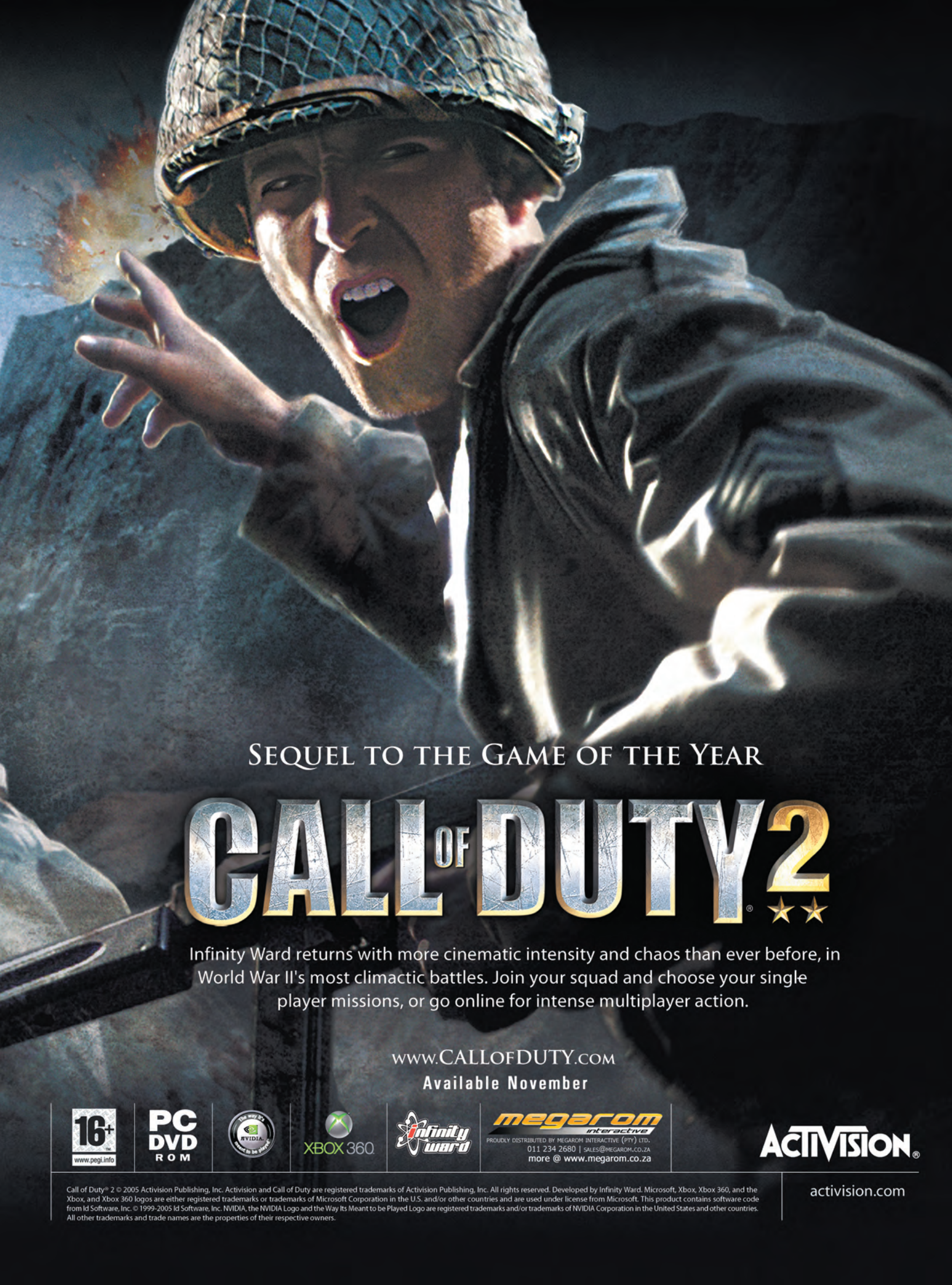
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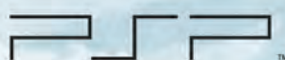


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PlayStation®2





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Serious Sam 2 | Starship Troopers | Total Overdose |
World Soccer

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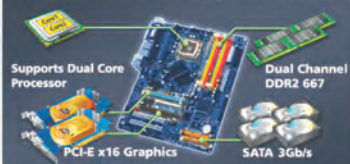
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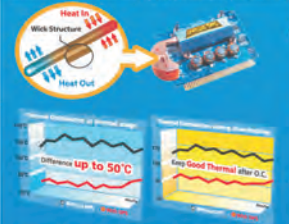


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ED'S NOTE



COVER STORY – THE TALE OF 2 APES

I GUESS I COULD SAY that King Kong is so big that we decided to run two different covers for this issue of NAG, but that would be a giant ape-sized lie. The real story is that there are two different covers because we secretly hope many of you will want both, netting us twice the sales for essentially the same magazine – being a collector of NAG has its ups and downs. Just kidding. There were two cover images available and they both looked cool and the office was split down the middle on a favourite. So as to not offend anyone's quirky tastes and my lack of decision making ability this time of the year, we went with both official cover images from the official game of the official movie of... these damn movie studios.

IT'S ALL GOOD... BETTER ACTUALLY.

THIS ISSUE WAS CRAZY; largely thanks to rAge bisecting our issue deadline, an increase in page numbers and plenty of press functions and events to attend – not to mention waiting for all the various approvals for the King Kong material. These Hollywood types really know how to shoot themselves in the foot by making it impossibly difficult for the press to actually feature their title. Regardless, the article is the lovechild of James, a press trip to New York and King Kong himself. Enjoy it. As a bonus, the King Kong [or King Dong if you listen to people in the office] demo is on this month's DVD [we held back production on the DVD just to squeeze it on]. So that's November in a nutshell.

In other unrelated news: I recently read a post on the NAG site about the F.E.A.R. demo and how it lagged some guy's machine to hell and back. After a brief session of posting he said he was off to the shop in the morning to buy a new 3D card. So, if I understand this correctly, this guy is going to drop a couple of grand because the latest FPS causes his once silky smooth setup to chunk along like a herd [or is that pod] of beached whales [is it still a pod if they're beached?]. Anyway, this got me thinking: is this really how we've been reduced to making purchasing decisions of this magnitude? If I were a game developer, I'd demand some kind of revenue share with the 3D card manufacturers. It's a racket that we blindly and willingly accept and sadly seem to encourage and enjoy [his fellow forum goers were actually urging him to dip into this child's college fund]. That said, there's nothing like the feeling of cranking everything to high | maximum | best and setting about those pesky aliens, soldiers or whoever is dumb enough to step in front of your crosshairs. There are a few topics to get through this month so I'll get on with it right away.

Magazine design competition

I THOUGHT THIS WAS GOING to be over rather quickly with no more than a few entries. Silly me, we

received around 20 exceptional efforts from some very talented and dedicated readers.

It's going to take some time to process all the applications, so if you're one of the hopefuls just hang in there. We're probably going to publish all of them on the next DVD, so make sure you get the December issue. Simply amazing, you'll see...

rAge 2005

AN EPIC EVENT BY all accounts [more people, bigger LAN, new exhibitors and tons of new games]. If you weren't there, never mind. There's always next year, and from some of the discussions we've already been having and during the course of the expo, rAge 2006 is going to be full of surprises. It truly is the best thing to happen to gaming and entertainment since the first issue of NAG [shameless self-promotion is so sad sometimes]. Anyway, somewhere inside this magazine there's a report back on the event covering all the best and worst bits from our journalist on the scene, Anton Lines. The December issue will feature the now famous rAge video where you can see just what all the fuss is about.

DVD issues

THE NAG DVD SEEMS to be an ongoing experiment we're doing with the NAG readers as the lab rats. Last issue some corruption crept into the DVD making process. All the files were checked and ran perfectly on one computer, and when they were copied over to another to be written on the DVD something went wrong [a few demos didn't install] – and no, we're not really sure how or what happened. So from now on there's an additional layer of checking involved and we've put one of the best demos from last month on this DVD. We're sorry for any aggravation this caused, because we know how we'd feel if the same thing happened to us.

Michael James [Editor]

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BYTES

Courses in game music and sound design

Electronic Arts and the GRAMMY Foundation have teamed up to introduce GRAMMY Pro Session: Video Game Music and Sound Design. This educational initiative aims to introduce would-be game music composers and sound engineers to the concepts and philosophies involved. Nonlinear music and interactive sound are points of emphasis in the curriculum. The first Pro Session was held on 17 October at EA's Los Angeles studio, and further classes will take place at various American locations over the next year.

SCEE president retires

Chris Deering will be stepping down as president of Sony Computer Entertainment Europe at the end of this year, and intends to move to the United States, where his family now lives. He will be replaced by



Fujio Nishida
New SCEE president

"Building on my experience in the US, I look forward to my new role as the President of Sony Europe," said Fujio Nishida. "The European market is highly diverse with many challenges and opportunities. I wish to further expand our business in Europe and thus contribute to the Sony Group as a whole."

Furthermore, Sony's development studios are no longer independent, but have been consolidated into Sony Computer Entertainment Worldwide Studios, under the leadership of Phil Harrison. The rationale behind this move is the facilitation of the development of worldwide hits, rather than titles that are specifically geared for one market or another.

Fujio Nishida, currently in charge of Electronics Marketing at Sony's Tokyo head office.



XBOX 360 READIES ITSELF FOR LAUNCH

SOME CONCRETE DETAILS ABOUT the Xbox 360 were recently made public. Unlike the first Xbox, DVDs will be playable even without the remote control, which will also be usable for powering the system up or down (the latter function will be accessible from the wireless controller too). Content stored on a laptop or PC will be accessible for playback via networking, wired or wireless. The wireless networking module will be the size of a 'small pack of cigarettes'. The USB ports will allow users to connect accessories such as cameras and keyboards, though the latter will be used exclusively for text entry, and will not be usable for controlling games. Various portable media devices will also connect to the USB ports, and are automatically detected by the system. Playing content from any source (be it the console's optical drive or hard drive, or a connected computer or portable device) will allow use of the visualiser, which has been developed by Jeff Minter (he has a long history in game and electronic entertainment design), and which is interactive via any controller and the upcoming video

camera. Original Xbox games will require the hard drive accessory, which is detachable and not subject to corruption if disconnected while in use. It is currently thought that the console will carry three cooling fans, and these will be employed in a scalable fashion – for example, when watching DVDs, the unit will only use one fan. These fans are said to be very quiet. Microsoft will be encouraging cross-platform game development, aiming at compatibility between different versions of a game, allowing Windows PC users and Xbox 360 users to connect to each other's games. The overall user interface makes use of the Guide, which is something like a highly evolved Start button, allowing users access to all manner of functions.

The Xbox 360 will arrive on American store shelves on 22 November, in Europe on 2 December and 10 December in Japan. This is the first time a console has been released in all of the above territories in such a short period of time, and therefore Microsoft is being careful to produce millions of units already to cope with demand and logistical requirements.

SUPERMAN RETURNS

Electronic Arts has acquired the rights to Superman Returns, and will be releasing a game for Xbox and current consoles on 30 June, next year, simultaneously with the launch of the movie.



SWAT 4 – THE STETCHKOV SYNDICATE

An expansion pack for Sierra Entertainment's SWAT 4 is scheduled for release early next year. As the title suggests, the story revolves around an Eastern European crime ring that starts to operate in the city. As well as the usual new weapons and levels, the add-on will offer a new multiplayer game mode.

PSP HACKED AGAIN

Well, it is inevitable that hackers would design and release a new hack-patch to circumvent PSP firmware's security protocols. Sony's recent 2.00 firmware release locked out loopholes that allowed users to run home-brew software, emulators and pirated software, as well as introducing some new functions such as a Web browser. The new hack allows the firmware to be reverted to version 1.50, and involves quite a complex process. No doubt Sony will soon sew up the hole that allows this particular hack.



FIFA INTERACTIVE WORLD CUP 2005

For the second time around, Xbox and Electronic Arts are running the only FIFA-sanctioned computer football World Cup. The action will take place both on-line and at various venues around the world, and will be using FIFA 06 from EA Sports. The finals will take place in London on 18 December, and will involve ten finalists - two of them drawn from the online tournament. The local event will take place on the 12th November 2005 at Edenvale Action Soccer in Johannesburg from 11am. Players wishing to enter simply need to arrive at the venue at 11am to register.

PlayStation®2 TOP TWENTY



1. Tekken 5



2. GT4



3. Ultimate Spider-Man



4. X-Men Legends II



5. Mortal Kombat: Shaolin Monks



6. EyeToy Kinetic



7. Stuart Little 3



8. Bratz



9. Genji



10. Midway Arcade Treasures 3



11. Everybody's Golf



12. SingStar Pop



13. Heroes of the Pacific



14. Without Warning



15. Pilot Down



16. Beatdown: Fists of Vengeance



17. Scooby Doo Unmasked



18. Top Spin



19. Evil Dead



20. Nightmare Before Christmas



SONY'S RELIGIOUS FAUX PAS

A recent PlayStation advertisement from Sony has offended the Catholic faith. The full-page ad featured a gamer wearing a crown of thorns made up of PlayStation button icons, and bore the subtitle "Dieci anni di passione", which translates to "ten years of passion". This commemorative ad has incensed Catholics, and may prove harmful to the company's prospects for the PlayStation 3, particularly in light of the fact that Sony's next-generation console will be released substantially later than Microsoft's Xbox 360 – offended Catholics can hardly be expected to wait around for the PS3 in these circumstances. Christians of other denominations may well also take exception to this marketing blunder.



GOD OF WAR SEQUELS PLANNED

R EPORTS HAVE COME TO light about two God of War sequels in the works. The first one will be released on PlayStation 2 next year, while the other is planned for the PlayStation 3. No release information is available at present.

ESRB HUNTS EASTER EGGS

Largely in response to the infamous GTA: San Andreas 'Hot Coffee' debacle, the ESRB ratings board has laid down an ultimatum to game publishers regarding hidden content within their products. Publishers are now required to thoroughly examine all their wares for 'Easter eggs' and any such that are found are to be declared prior to the rating process. The ESRB has also decreed that all games released since 2004 are to be reviewed, and a deadline of 9 January 2006 has been set for publishers to come forward with any hidden content. Should an undeclared Easter egg subsequently come to light, publishers may face punitive action in addition to any corrective measures.



Cellphone games

Last year, sales for mobile phone games crossed the \$1 billion mark and an annual growth of about 50% is expected for the next five years. The industry is expected to consolidate within the next six to 18 months, meaning that any company trying to enter the market after that point will find it difficult and expensive to break in.

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METAL GEAR SOLID 4

A few details about the next MGS title, Guns of the Patriots, were recently revealed. The game will rely more heavily on graphical representations of characters' facial expressions and subtle gestures for purposes of conveying emotions, rather than depending entirely on speech. Furthermore, Snake will be portrayed as having aged somewhat, a concept that will be used in the future of the series. MGS titles will continue to be released as long as demand for them exists, although Kojima, famed for the previous titles and involved in MGS4, will not involve himself heavily, as he is embarking on a project he has been contemplating for some years now, which the currently evolving technology is finally going to be able to facilitate. Finally, effects previously restricted to cut-scenes can now be rendered real-time, so players can expect a visual experience reaching new levels of immersion. Guns of the Patriots is scheduled for release next year.



AMERICA'S ARMY INVADES SA

Intended primarily as a recruitment tool for the US Armed Forces, America's Army is a free online combat game. A server has recently been set up locally by MWEB Home, allowing players to accumulate honour, which was previously all but impossible as the American servers restricted access, disallowing high-latency connections. Anyone interested in playing can visit www.americasarmy.co.za.

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VIRTUAL PETS STILL A HUGE HIT

Many readers will remember the craze that was Tamagotchi – small electronic ‘virtual pets’ that required lots of attention and annoyed everyone in the vicinity, particularly anyone trying to hold a conversation with the owner. While Tamagotchi was a dedicated electronic device, Nintendogs from Nintendo is a software title for the DS, and is even more popular than the old gizmo. It is currently America’s fastest selling videogame, and the best-selling new portable game franchise ever, and has sold out in many locations.



Sam & Max back after 12 years

Steve Purcell, creator of 1993’s adventure Sam & Max Hit the Road has signed a deal with Telltale Games to create a new title based on these characters. LucasArts had previously been working on a title, but cancelled production earlier this year, and subsequently the rights to the franchise reverted back to Purcell. No release date has been announced, but it is known that the title is intended to be released in episodic format.



PSP GETS TV

“PSP OWNERS WILL SOON be able to deploy the device’s built-in Wi-Fi to watch video from home entertainment terminals, anytime, anywhere in the world,” stated Sony CEO Howard Stringer in a speech which was delivered at the CEATEC electronics show in Japan recently. PSP owners will also be able to record television programmes using digital video recorders and then watch them back on the PSP, using the larger capacity memory sticks which are now available.

Stringer added that his vision for Sony is “One that is streamlined in terms of product lines, manufacturing and efficiency... We will become a more nimble, responsive and creative company with a better relationship with the public.”



N-GAGE ACADEMY

Nokia has launched an online campaign in a bid to inform and educate mobile phone users on how to download and share mobile games.

“The N-Gage Academy is our way of showing how easy it is to download games onto your Nokia mobile phone. Gamers can also send the mini-game to their friends by Bluetooth. The N-Gage Academy campaign shows everyone that mobile gaming is fun and that everyone can play. This is also something we want to do with our next generation of mobile gaming on Nokia smartphones – with fantastic gaming quality,” said Gerard Wiener, Vice President, Games Business Program at Nokia.

By going to the N-Gage Academy Website, you can send a mini-game to another compatible Nokia mobile phone, either by WAP/GPRS settings or, by downloading the mini-game ZIP file to a personal computer for transfer by Bluetooth or MMC, with at least 2MB of memory.

[www.n-gage.com/academy]

Gearbox Software and Epic Games have entered into a long-term agreement that allows Gearbox to use the Unreal Engine 3 in all its upcoming titles. Previous generations of the Unreal Engine have been used by Gearbox in the past. Brothers in Arms 3 will use this latest version.

A young man in Singapore has been granted military service deferment in order to allow him to participate in the World Cyber Games. This is in line with the country’s policy on supporting sport, culture and the arts. Singapore will be host to this year’s World Cyber Games finals, taking place in November.

Peter Jackson will be producing the Halo movie, which will be filmed in New Zealand. At present, director and cast have not yet been announced.

Bungie and Team Ninja have announced that a character from Halo will appear in Dead or Alive 4. So far, which character this will be remains a mystery.

TONY HAWK'S AMERICAN WASTELAND

PlayStation 2

ACTIVISION



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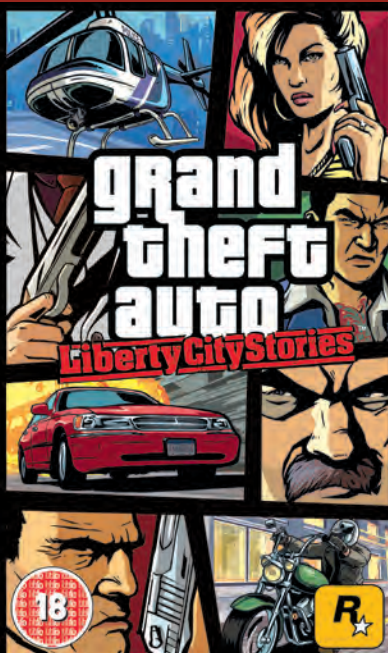
NEW WARHAMMER TITLE

Namco Hometek has announced Warhammer: Mark of Chaos, a real-time strategy game coming to the PC late next year. This title will emphasise controlling mighty champions and great armies rather than base and resource management. The factions that will be represented are Empire, Elves, Chaos and Skaven, and Dwarfs, Goblins, Orcs and Vampires will also make appearances.

GUILD WARS WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

NCsoft and ArenaNet have begun the first Guild Wars World Championship, which kicked off on 1 October and runs for three months, with the finals taking place in Taipei, Taiwan, on 16 February.

[www.guildwars.com/events/championship]



GTA: LIBERTY CITY STORIES FOR PSP

Rockstar Games finally revealed a few details about this upcoming title's multiplayer capabilities. Making use of the PSP's Wi-Fi functionality, three multiplayer modes will be made possible. Survivor is deathmatch, with kill limit or time limit ending the game. Protection Racket involves teams taking turns at trying to destroy the opposition's booty (in this case, limousines). Get Stretch is a variant of capture-the-flag with a drivable car being the 'flag'. The game may already be available by the time you read this.



Gunslinger...

Follow the epic storyline of gunslinger Colton White in an engrossing storyline and plot progression will transport players back in time to the lawless West where they encounter ladies of the night, a murderous preacher, and many other characters.



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PC
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WEB SCORES

Fable The Lost Chapters [PC]

NAG [100]	75
GAMESPY.COM [5]	NR
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	8.6
IGN.COM [10]	8.7



Worms 4 Mayhem [PC]

NAG [100]	85
GAMESPY.COM [5]	NR
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	NR
IGN.COM [10]	NR



Dungeon Siege II [PC]

NAG [100]	75
GAMESPY.COM [5]	4.0
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	7.9
IGN.COM [10]	8.5



Brian Lara International Cricket [PS2]

NAG [100]	76
GAMESPY.COM [5]	NR
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	NR
IGN.COM [10]	NR



Ninendogs [DS]

NAG [100]	90
GAMESPY.COM [5]	3.5
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	9.1
IGN.COM [10]	8.8



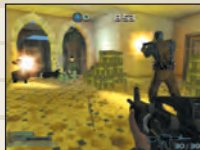
Everybodys Golf [PSP]

NAG [100]	90
GAMESPY.COM [5]	NR
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	NR
IGN.COM [10]	8.8



Cold Winter [PS2]

NAG [100]	78
GAMESPY.COM [5]	3.5
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	7.5
IGN.COM [10]	7.5



Resident Evil Outbreak File 2 [PS2]

NAG [100]	79
GAMESPY.COM [5]	3.0
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	7.1
IGN.COM [10]	7.0



The ratings in this section, apart from the NAG ratings, are not the opinion of NAG Magazine. Duh.



TONY HAWK'S AMERICAN SOUNDTRACK

Sixty songs are featured on the Tony Hawk's American Wasteland soundtrack, which was released at the end of October. "We've compiled the ultimate Tony Hawk music line-up," said Tim Riley, worldwide executive of music at Activision. "Whether skating their way through East L.A. or biking through Hollywood, the soundtrack will draw players into the game with its perfect accompaniment to the adrenaline pumping action."

The game has also recently been released on all major console platforms.

EA'S XBOX 360 LAUNCH LINE-UP

EA has announced five titles that will be available at the time of the Xbox 360's launch. These are: Need for Speed Most Wanted, FIFA 06: Road to FIFA World Cup, NBA Live 06, Tiger Woods PGA Tour 06 and Madden NFL 06.

Other games currently in production include The Godfather, Battlefield 2: Modern Combat and a new Burnout Revenge title.

CROSS-PLATFORM EVOLUTION

A group of graphics engineers and games producers led by Sony is developing a tool dubbed 'Collada', which is aimed at simplifying the cross-platform porting of game titles. The software focuses on scaling 3D graphic properties to suit the destination platform. Thus, a game designed for, say, a next-generation console can be fed through this set of algorithms in order to reduce the graphics to a level that can be supported by, for example, a mobile phone. The software allows the core logic of a game to be unchanged, and handles graphics in an object-orientated fashion that allows the game to be developed for a high-end system and then scaled down to more basic equipment, while freeing the developers from the hassle of repeatedly re-coding for different platforms. Collada yields products that are compliant with OpenGL ES 2.0, the emerging standard for 'hand-top' devices. Although Sony is spearheading this effort, it is ironic that the PSP does not support OpenGL ES, so the trend being set here is likely to leave the handheld behind.

A Microsoft executive has declared his prediction that about half of Xbox 360 owners will use their consoles online, citing the free Xbox Live Silver subscription that will be provided with the hardware. Whether this is an attempt to seduce investors or is a reliable prediction remains to be seen.

Ubisoft has announced that a fourth instalment in Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell series is in the works, and will be available by the middle of next year. No other concrete details have yet been made public.

Sony celebrated the PlayStation's 10th anniversary by being awarded an Emmy for Outstanding Achievement in Technology and Advanced New Media. The console, with sales of over 100 million units, transformed videogaming into a household phenomenon.



SCHWARZENEGGER SIGNS VIOLENT GAMES BILL

Arnold Schwarzenegger, Governor of California has signed Assembly Speaker Tem Leland Yee's violent videogame bill into law.

"Today I signed legislation to ensure parent involvement in determining which videogames are appropriate for their children," said Governor Schwarzenegger. "The bill I signed will require that violent videogames be clearly labeled and not be sold to children under 18 years old. Many of these games are made for adults and choosing games that are appropriate for kids should be a decision made by their parents."

Specifically, Assembly Bill (AB) 1179 will end the sale and rental of violent videogames that depict serious injury to human beings in a manner that is especially heinous, atrocious, or cruel, to persons who are under 18 years of age. Retailers who violate the act will be liable in an amount up to \$1,000 for each violation.

The Entertainment Software Association president Douglas Lowenstein was not happy about this decision and made the following statement: "We are disappointed that politicians of both parties chose to toss overboard the First Amendment and free artistic and creative expression in favour of political expediency. AB 1179 is punitive against retailers, will waste limited taxpayer dollars, and when it is struck down by the courts, as has been the fate of similar statutes, parents will be no better off for this effort to damage one of the state's fastest growing and most exciting industries that is providing some of the most compelling entertainment in the world today. ESA intends to file a lawsuit to strike this law down and we are confident that we will prevail."

Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection dongle for DS

Buffalo, Inc. a global leader in complete computer peripheral solutions will jointly develop with Nintendo a new Nintendo-ready wireless software AP - the Nintendo Wi-Fi USB Connector, which will be sold by Nintendo worldwide. The product is designed to allow distant gamers to interact with each other wirelessly through the Internet. Attached to a computer, the AP provides a wireless connection to the Nintendo DS via the computer's Internet connection. The AP includes software, which notifies users when their Nintendo DS devices are within range. Users can establish a connection between devices with a single click. Once the initial connection has been established, subsequent connections are automatic.

When inserted into a USB port on a PC, a window will open establishing a link between the DS, computer and Internet.

DS owners will also be able to construct a Friends and there will also be an option to play with a random opponent.

The connector will only support the Windows format for now and will be available in Europe on 25 November at an estimated retail price of £30.



MICROSOFT SUED

Danish company Glud & Marstrand has sued Microsoft for violating a non-disclosure agreement regarding a proprietary metal game case design. The two companies discussed the use of this case for the Halo 2 Special Edition a couple of years ago, but since then Microsoft has contracted a company called Viva to manufacture these same cases. G&M is seeking damages from both Microsoft and Viva.



Unforgiving...

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ON THE HORIZON

US RELEASE DATES

RELEASE DATE	GAME	PLATFORMS	GENRE
1 November	Armored Core: Formula Front	PSP	Action
1 November	Call of Duty 2: Big Red One	GCN PS2	Shooter
1 November	James Bond 007: From Russia With Love	GCN PS2	Action
1 November	Pac-Man World 3	GCN PC Xbox	Action
1 November	Prince of Persia: The Two Thrones	PC	Action
1 November	Star Wars Battlefront II	PS2 Xbox	Shooter
1 November	Star Wars Galaxies: Trials of Obi-Wan	PC	MMORPG
1 November	The Incredibles: Rise of the Underminer	DS GBA GCN PS2	Action
1 November	WRC	PSP	Racing
2 November	Dungeons & Dragons Online: Stormreach	PC	RPG
7 November	Earth 2160	PC	Strategy
7 November	Mario Party 7	GCN	Party
7 November	The Matrix: Path of Neo	PS2	Action
8 November	Castlevania: Curse of Darkness	PS2 Xbox	Action
8 November	Desperados 2: Cooper's Revenge	PC	Strategy
8 November	Gun	GCN PC PS2	Shooter
8 November	Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire	DS PC PS2 PSP	Action
8 November	Painkiller: Hell Wars	Xbox	Shooter
8 November	Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 3: Mutant Nightmare	DS PS2 Xbox	Action
8 November	The Lord of the Rings Tactics	PSP	Strategy
8 November	The Sims 2	PSP	Simulation
9 November	City of Villains	PC	RPG
11 November	The Movies	PC	Simulation
14 November	American Conquest: Divided Nation	PC	Strategy
14 November	Crash Tag Team Racing	DS	Racing
14 November	EyeToy: Operation SpyToy	PS2	Action
14 November	Mario Kart DS	DS	Racing
14 November	Stargate SG-1: The Alliance	PS2	Adventure
14 November	The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe	DS PC PS2	Action
14 November	WWE SmackDown! vs. RAW 2006	PS2	Wrestling
14 November	50 Cent: Bulletproof	PS2	Action
14 November	Aeon Flux	PS2	Action
14 November	America's Army: Rise of a Soldier	Xbox PS2	Shooter
14 November	Anarchy Online: Lost Eden	PC	RPG
14 November	Battlefield 2: Special Forces	PC	Shooter
14 November	Burnout Legends	DS	Racing
14 November	Dynasty Warriors 4	PC	Strategy
15 November	F1 Grand Prix	PSP	Racing
15 November	Infected	PSP	Action
15 November	Marc Ecko's Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure	PS2 Xbox	Action
15 November	Need for Speed Most Wanted	DS PC PS2 Xbox PSP	Racing
15 November	Shadow the Hedgehog	PS2	Action
15 November	Space Hack	PC	Action
15 November	The Matrix: Path of Neo	PC PS2	Action
15 November	True Crime: New York City	PS2 Xbox	Action
20 November	Viewtiful Joe: Red Hot Rumble	GCN	Fighting
21 November	King Kong	PC PS2 PSP DS	Action
21 November	The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion	PC	RPG
22 November	Dragon Ball Z: Supersonic Warriors 2	DS	Action
22 November	EyeToy: Kinetic	PS2	Other
22 November	Project Gotham Racing 3	X360	Racing
24 November	Mario & Luigi: Partners in Time	DS	RPG
30 November	Ridge Racer 6	X360	Racing
30 November	Starship Troopers	PC Xbox	Shooter

Look & Listen
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CHARTS

PC Games

#	Title
1	Sims 2 Nightlife Expansion
2	Sims 2
3	Grand Theft Auto San Andreas
4	Dungeon Siege 2
5	Half-Life 2
6	Battlefield 2
7	Need For Speed Underground 1 Classics
8	Sims 2 University Expansion
9	Worms 4 Mayhem
10	Unreal Tournament 2004
11	CSI Miami Exclusive
12	Sims Deluxe Edition
13	Star Wars KOTOR 1 Classics
14	Brian Lara Cricket 2005
15	Need For Speed Underground 2

PlayStation 2

#	Title
1	Need For Speed Underground 2/Burnout 3 Combo
2	Burnout Revenge
3	Burnout 3 Platinum
4	Gran Turismo 4
5	Rugby 2005
6	EA Sports Pack: Tiger 05/FIFA 05
7	Cricket 2005
8	Brian Lara Cricket 2005
9	Grand Theft Auto San Andreas
10	Singstar Pop with microphones
11	Ubisoft 3 Pack
12	Ratchet & Clank 3 Platinum
13	SSX3 Platinum
14	Tekken 5
15	Combat Trilogy Pack

PSP

#	Title
1	Burnout Legends
2	Need For Speed Underground Rivals
3	Wipeout Pure
4	Metal Gear Acid
5	Fired Up
6	Ape Academy
7	Medievil Resurrection
8	NFL Street 2 Unleashed
9	Everybody's Golf
10	Midnight Club 3
11	World Tour Soccer Challenge
12	Bad Boys Movie
13	Lumines Puzzle Fusion
14	Ridge Racer
15	You Got Served Movie

NOVEMBER AT A GLANCE



4
Movie
DOOM
www.doommovie.com

12
Gaming
**FIFA Interactive
World Cup**
Johannesburg
www.FIFA.com

16-20
Gaming
**World Cyber
Games Grand Final**
Singapore
www.worldcybergames.com



ACTIVISION CONFIRMS NEW ID/RAVEN TITLE

Activision and id Software have confirmed that the latest instalment in the Wolfenstein franchise is currently in development by Raven Software for PC, with id staff assisting as executive producers on the new title.

After the initial announcement of the Wolfenstein game for the Xbox 360 platform, id's legendary engine developer John Carmack, stated that this will represent the first time that an id Software project has led out on a console platform rather than on the PC - with the developer praising the tools available for Xbox 360 as being better than the equivalents on PC.



EA AND SANDISK TEAM UP

Electronic Arts and flash memory provider SanDisk have teamed up to release a Flash Memory Card version of Madden NFL 06, which will include bonus game content. This extra material is actually merely game saves that allow players to skip much play in order to access advanced game features available to experienced players – essentially, they are a sort of 'cheat'.

Madden NFL 06 is named after John Madden, famed television network sportscaster and former coach of the Oakland Raiders football team. "We believe that this content will be well-received by PSP owners," said Christina Day, SanDisk retail product marketing manager for game cards. "It differentiates our products and provides real value and excitement for fans of the game."

"Consumers who buy Madden NFL 06 for the PSP and a SanDisk PRO Duo Game card will get a head start in collecting their points," said Todd Sitrin, vice president of marketing at EA. "Since the Sony PSP relies on flash memory cards to store game data from each play session, we saw the logic of bundling Game Saves with the cards to highlight features that are unique to the PSP edition of Madden NFL 06."



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MULTIPLAYER

IDENTITY DEFEND WCG TITLE, SHASE TRIUMPHS AGAIN

THE WORLD CYBER GAMES SA final event was held in Sandton City on the 17th and 18th of September, featuring the top eight players and teams in each electronic discipline. While not all of last year's problems were resolved, it was clear that the 2005 series of events ran more smoothly than before, and complaints from gamers were limited to a minimum. Marketing was perhaps the least impressive facet of the events, especially the official informative pamphlet which was riddled with embarrassing copy and factual errors. However, the playing areas, while not perfect, were much improved and the competition PCs better suited to the requirements of the games.

The Counter-Strike: Source tournament began as most people had predicted. Identity and Evolve breezed through the first round, while the Cape Town entrants (Nix / Enmity) and Gauteng's replacement, Notic, struggled against the more experienced teams. The upper bracket semi-final saw a far closer contest, with Zero Defekt (Z7) surprising Identity with a stunning performance, but falling just short of the win, 13-16. Meanwhile, Evolve had no trouble with dispatching the Bad Habit Boyz (16-4) and moved on to face Identity in the upper bracket final. In the first of several eagerly anticipated matchups, Evolve asserted their dominance once more, trouncing Identity 16-6 on de_dust2.

However, the lower bracket was this year's site of controversy and intrigue. The intense rivalry between BHB and Z7 proved that the skill level of up-and-coming teams is getting closer and closer to that of the top. Heading into the third/fourth place match, both teams were absolutely confident of their impending victory, and it was perhaps for this reason that the game was so close – and so fiercely disputed afterwards. Initially the win went to Zero Defekt, 16-14 on de_dust2, but the following day the spectators were welcomed with a treat. The match was to be replayed.

Zero Defekt had used illegal 'configs' (setup files) when setting up their PCs, allegedly giving them a significant frames-per-second advantage. They would have been disqualified for this infringement, but information surfaced that they had in fact checked the use of this 'config' with the event officials, who had mistakenly allowed it. The rematch proved to be just as thrilling as the first encounter, going into double overtime before BHB emerged as the victors.

As fate (or perhaps human nature) would have it, this was not to be the last of the matter. Z7 complained that BHB had



been using an illegal parameter (forcing the DirectX level to 8.0 instead of the default 9.0) and the overtime section of the game was replayed yet again. This decision was, however, another mistake on the part of the officials, as the DirectX level value in question was the fault of a bug in the CS: Source code, and not an intentional transgression by BHB. The final result saw Z7 overcoming a dejected BHB and progressing to face Identity in the lower bracket final.

After making short work of Zero Defekt, Identity returned to face Evolve in the grand final. Judging from the results of the upper bracket, it was expected to be a fairly one-sided contest, and while this was basically what happened, it happened in reverse. Identity started confidently, taking the first pistol round and sustaining the momentum to take a huge lead in the first map (de_dust2). Evolve were unable to pull the game back and ended up losing 16-8. The second map (also de_dust2) developed into a copy of the first, with clutch-play by every one of the Identity members giving Evolve no chance of a comeback. A superb individual effort by Evolve's Jannie "Hellhound" van Niekerk was not enough, and Identity walked away with the trip to Singapore for the world finals.

WarCraft III was won by Electronic Sports World Cup star Travis "Shase" Weedon, who had to fight his way through the lower bracket after losing 2-0 to team-mate Reaver. His performance proves his previous victory was no fluke, and cements him as the best strategy player in South Africa. FIFA 2005, a new addition to the World Cyber Games, was won by Daniel Robeiro. **NAG**

RESULTS

Counter-Strike: Source

1. Identity Gaming
2. Evolve.Aim
3. Zero Defekt
4. Bad Habit Boyz

WarCraft III: TFT

1. q6-Shase
2. q6-Reaver
3. nf-Cavalier
4. d[A].H4T3

FIFA 2005

1. Daniel Robeiro
2. Monwane Khopo

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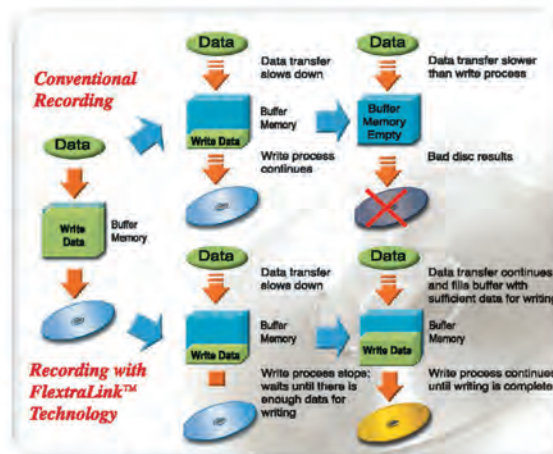
The ASUS CB-5216A1T adopts the new SATA interface that is the new-generation internal storage interconnects designed to replace parallel ATA technology. SATA is the proactive evolution of the ATA interface from a parallel bus to serial bus architecture. This architecture overcomes the electrical constraints that induce difficulties in continued speed enhancements for the traditional parallel ATA bus. Major benefits of the new SATA interface include higher speed, simpler upgradeable storage device and easier configuration.



SATA can be connected to the system externally through an external SATA connection port.

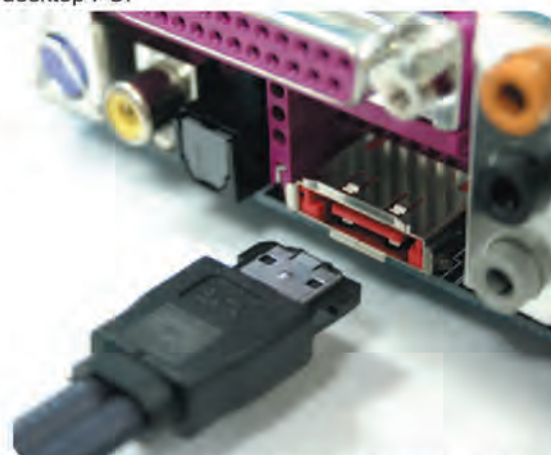
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FlextraLink™ prevents buffer underrun problems and eliminates the creation of unusable discs, while FlextraSpeed™ enhances accuracy and reliability when writing and rewriting across a broad range of certified media. Throughout the recording process, FlextraLink™ consistently keeps track of the data buffer status, whereas FlextraSpeed™ continuously monitors the recording media and sets the most effective writing speed to ensure top-quality recording. Both ASUS proprietary technologies occupy minimal system resources, allowing the PC to remain fully operational and available for other applications even during the recording process.



The Best Solution for Fast Data Storage with Precision

The ASUS CB-5216A1T is Microsoft Windows' certified and supports the re-write technology, Mt. Rainier, ensuring stable quality as well as great compatibility. It also utilizes CAV (Constant Angular Velocity) and Z-CLV writing strategy to significantly shorten recording time and achieve higher average recording speed compared to other high-speed CD-RW drives on the market. Offering superior efficiency, the ASUS CB-5216A1T is the reliable and most cost effective data storage solution for your desktop PC.



4-pin power cable can be used for SATA interface to share the same power supply with the motherboard.

RAGE 2005 FROM THE INSIDE OUT



An independent review by Anton "The_Basilisk" Lines

AS MANY READERS OF NAG Magazine will know from experience, this year's rAge managed to attract its biggest turnout yet. To give a basic indication, all seven hundred seats at the NAG LAN were sold out within 30 days of becoming available at Computicket. In fact, so great was the demand for the event that people were actually scalping tickets.

The LAN itself was everything I have come to expect from the Vaalhoolligan Crew. Considering the sheer size of the network, I would have forgiven a little lag here and there, but apart from a few short periods of downtime, the speed was as fast as if there were only ten PCs connected. In addition, power problems did not surface once, setting the benchmark for major events countrywide. The staff, especially ShadowOrphan and Wovenoid, was exceptionally helpful and good-tempered about it too. Attention was paid to small details. For instance, to correct a previous mistake, music was played only at an acceptable volume, and only in the major walkways through the LAN area. A variety of games were played, with servers provided for all of the most popular. Battlefield 2, Unreal Tournament 2004, Call of Duty and Counter-Strike were among the more recognisable.

Joining in the spirit of Quake 4's expected release later this month, the VC staff organised a 128-player Quake III tournament. Taking advantage of the absence of all the top

old-school players, Relic breezed through the competition, defeating the relatively inexperienced Slick in the grand final. Another newcomer by the name of Phr4ntic finished just behind, in third place.

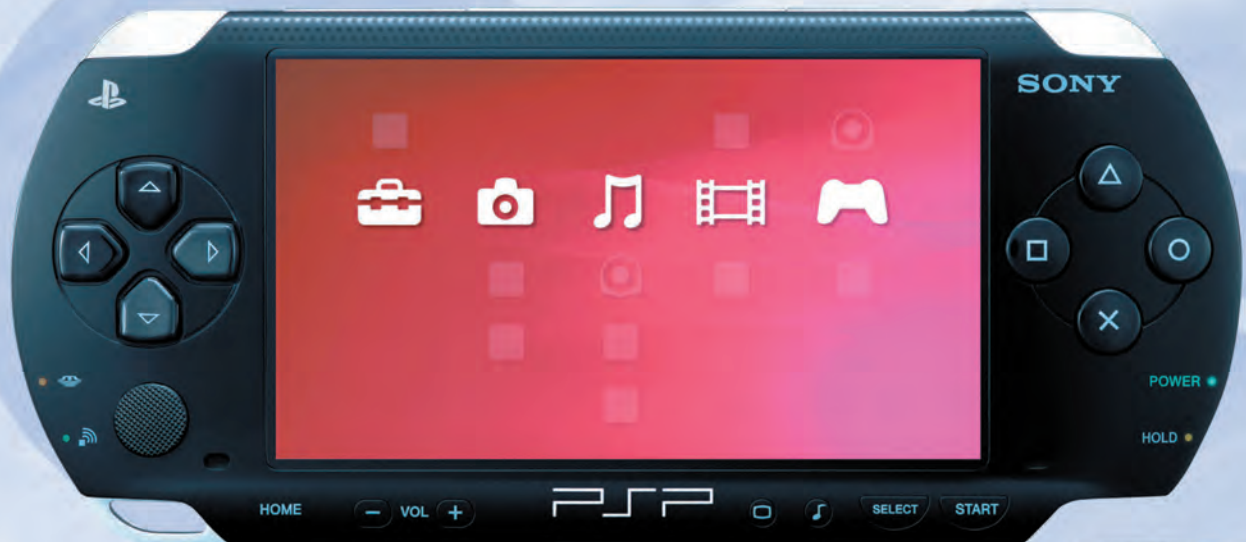
Moving to the ground floor of the expo, one became truly surrounded by the broader gaming industry. Exhibition stands ranged from electronic hardware and software, to trading card games, to anime, to just about anything else you could think of. Telkom and SAFACT managed to set up shop without causing too much of a stir amongst the attendees. Michael James amusingly rolled about on a Segway electric scooter, the badger hunt had people searching in the most obscure locations, and in the centre of it all, the main event unfolded before the public's eyes – the R100,000 Counter-Strike: Source competition.

CS: Source has still not managed to shake the problems that have plagued it ever since its inception as a tournament title. The Source engine, for all its glory, does not make use of dual processors, and thus Arena 77's servers were reduced to half capacity. The tournament administrators were not entirely blameless,



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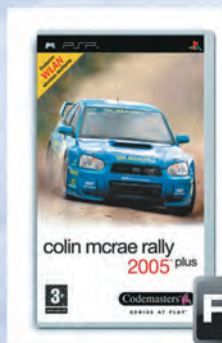
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PSP Midnight Club 3



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PSP Colin McRae 2005



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PSP Toca 2



R 399.95

PSP Twisted Metal Black

Available from 8 November



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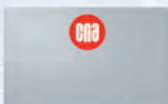
PSP Underground Remix



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however, as this problem had already been identified as early as May. The long delays in Saturday's play can therefore be partially attributed to carelessness. Complaints about the competence of the staff also shed a dim light on proceedings, with a long and heated debate erupting afterwards on the Arena 77 forums (www.arena77.co.za/forums/). Len Nery, head of Arena 77, has apologised for the problems and vowed to use the criticism to improve future events.

The spectator facilities at rAge were certainly a step in the right direction. A big screen was set up in front of a grandstand area and running commentary was provided for those sitting down to watch. However, with the finals being played on the stage underneath the screen itself, and the commentator in close proximity, important strategic information was inadvertently given away to the teams as they were playing, compromising the integrity of the matches. To solve this issue, until sound-proof booths are available on stage for the players, the actual game should be played in a location removed from the spectator area.

As for the results, the rivalry between Team Evolve and Identity Gaming was again the main attraction. The final went down to three maps. Identity won the first, 16-14, on de_dust2, in a similar fashion to their WCG victory. But Evolve surged back on de_prodigy, winning 16-12 and taking the championship into a third game. The final map, de_train was tied at 15-15. In the overtime that followed, clutch-play by Identity stars Explicit and Incin gave them a final, hard-fought win and R50,000 courtesy of Rectron. Evolve received R30,000 courtesy of EA for second place and BHB took R10,000 courtesy of Telkom and Look & Listen for third place.

Perhaps even a bigger event for the local competitive community was the presence of Johnathan "Fatal1ty" Wendel, well-known professional gamer and several times world champion. Fatal1ty was in South Africa, along with his training partner Brian "Zen" Grapatin for an ABIT Fatal1ty Shootout, which gave local players a chance to challenge him and win prizes for their efforts. Unfortunately, the Painkiller community in South Africa is virtually non-existent, and so nobody was able

to claim the R20,000 prize, but several ABIT motherboards were handed out as consolation awards. I had a chance to sit down with the two Painkiller stars to ask a few questions about their stay in South Africa and competitive gaming in general.

"The most surprising thing about South Africa for me was that Montecasino doesn't have Texas Hold 'Em (a type of poker)," laughed Johnathan after I asked about his expectations. "Nothing's really been too out of the ordinary so far, but we're going on Monday and Tuesday to see more of the country, so maybe after that."

Brian added, "The pizza's been really good. That surprised me."

It was immediately clear that both Johnathan and Brian are just ordinary young men who happen to be exceptionally good at a computer game. Friendly, considerate and keen to get along with everyone they met, it was difficult to think of them as celebrities. I asked Johnathan if his status ever prevented him from being 'one of the guys.' "Obviously I go out with the guys and party after the tournament is over," he replied. "But before it happens, everyone knows I'm very serious about winning. I stay by myself and train just like any other athlete. Of course I'm not going to go be your buddy-buddy before a tournament."

Travelling the world certainly has its pros, but how does this schedule affect gaming performance? Brian was quick to tell me that playing on home ground is always an advantage: "For CPL Dallas we got to practise at home for once, and we had about two and a half weeks, playing pretty hardcore. But we also got to relax. That's important. When you're in your own environment it's less stressful. Overseas you're jetlagged all the time."

During their stay, the two were provided with a bodyguard. I asked if this was standard practice. "I don't really think about it too much," said Johnathan. "It's mainly my business partners who want me to have a bodyguard to protect their investment. I guess it depends on where we go, but we always have someone taking care of us."

By the end of the weekend, Johnathan had only conceded a single frag in his shootout. Eventually, he started to take on two opponents at a time to keep warm. When asked if the local standard was disappointing, he said: "Obviously it'd be great to play some higher profile gamers, but the Fatal1ty Shootout's all about fun. So far the crowd's been pretty good. When we do shootouts we usually get everyone wired, and that's what it's all about." **NAG**

See the Cover DVD for more photos from rAge 2005

The D-Link Network

The layout of the LAN consisted of 4 x DGS-3324SR connected to each other with a 4-port Link aggregation (1Gbps on each port). The backbone on the main switches D-Link provided was more than 1Gb backbone, in theory it was a 4Gb backbone. On each row they installed either a 24-port or 48-port switch with gigabit ports. The gigabit ports were connected directly to the backbone switches. All the servers in the admin area were also connected to the network with a gigabit connection.

The results:

700 gamers were playing and copying files 24/7 the whole weekend and all of the above switches were only using between 15% and 20% CPU utilisation. No LAG was experienced on the network and the overall comment afterwards from gamers were that this was the best LAN they ever played on, which was LAG free with low pings, making it very enjoyable for them to play against each other. The network D-Link provided was more than capable of handling 700 gamers and D-Link hope to supply the same network again next year to see if more than 1000 gamers will push up the overall LAN utilisation.





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INTERVIEW



The godfather of Street Fighter has decided to go it alone, and his new company, Game Republic, is determined to make waves with its new samurai title. But Yoshiki Okamoto is feeling nostalgic. . .

YOSHIKI OKAMOTO

GAME REPUBLIC

WHAT DO YOU ASK the man who created the most respected fighting games of all time, and one of videogaming's most important milestones? Easy: who's your favourite Street Fighter character? "Zangief," Yoshiki Okamoto immediately answers. "The character is very similar to my lifestyle – high risk, high return, and I walk around half naked, jumping onto females that don't want me to, to spin them around." Okamoto is awesome – rapturous laughter (his and ours) which fills the room, accompanies the whole interview. He's not typically Japanese. He's wise-cracking and laid back with an almost punk-rock attitude, but not an iota of arrogance.

Okamoto has been in the industry a considerable time, beginning his career at Konami. However, his work at Japanese giant Capcom is more influential and important, and despite being here to promote his new company, he doesn't mind talking about past achievements. "I started in the industry at a company called Konami, and after that I joined Capcom, where I was involved in the development of 1942, 1943, Final Fight, Street Fighter II, Resident Evil, Onimusha and... Super Mario Bros," he says with a straight face, before laughing at the confusion he has caused. Of course, he had nothing to do with Super Mario. That's just his little joke.

But it's not every day that the chance to quiz the creator of Street Fighter II comes around, and Okamoto is happy to supply us with details. "Street Fighter II is a sequel to Street Fighter I, which was developed by someone completely different," he explains. "Looking at Street Fighter I, there were a lot of things I wasn't happy with." He's clearly keen to distance himself from the universally unpopular original. "I then created Final Fight as I thought that the market was not ready for Street Fighter II yet. So I created Street Fighter II using everything I had learned there." So what does he cite as his influences? "I read a lot, so books. Also movies, but mainly conversations with other people are a large creative influence." Anyone doubting the authenticity of Okamoto and his claims to Street Fighter is silenced during his post-interview karate demonstration. Suddenly invigorated and exploding with energy, he throws crescent kicks, palm thrusts and even a sly dragon punch, seemingly just for fun. It's clear to see why his games contain so much personality – the man is

bursting at the seams with the stuff.

So we have a creative, vivacious developer with Street Fighter II under his belt and a heavy involvement with Resident Evil and Onimusha. Why on earth would he risk it all to start out on his own? "I was fired," he deadpans. The awkward silence is soon replaced by the now familiar sound of Okamoto's belly laugh. "Sorry, that was a joke," he says. "Capcom had become a very large company and getting authorisation for creating a brand new game had become very difficult. A company knows that sequels of established brands will be more likely to make money, but I wanted to make brand new titles." It's encouraging to find there are still figures in the industry that are willing to risk everything just to stick to their guns. "I decided to leave the company, and make my own," he explains. "I'm the CEO of a very small game

“2D fighting games are not good for the market at the moment”

developing company called Game Republic, which nobody has heard of.”

Game Republic's first game, the samurai action title Genji: Dawn Of The Samurai, is set to change that. Capturing the essence of films like Hero and House Of Flying Daggers while keeping its roots in Japanese folklore, it's set to win many admirers when it reaches Europe. Okamoto isn't worried about how the Eastern story will translate for a Western audience, either. "The costumes, the whole 'mysterious orient' thing is very popular and translates to the West," he says. Okamoto knows his markets.

Yoshiki Okamoto is a visionary, self-assured and infinitely entertaining developer. Game Republic has already established a potential franchise with Genji. So what can we expect in the future? Not a 2D fighter, unfortunately. "2D fighting games are not good for the market at the moment, so I won't be producing any 2D fighters in the near future," he says. A shame, but the games industry is still a brighter place when Okamoto is around. **NAG**

INTERVIEW



Chris Taylor
CEO / Creative Director

CHRIS TAYLOR BEGAN HIS career in the video games business at Distinctive Software in Canada. His first title, *Hardball II* was a sequel to the popular *Hardball*, and won the SPA (Software Publishers Association) award for best sports game of the year. Chris then created *4D Boxing*, which won many accolades for its innovation as a 3D title. He later served as designer and project lead for the original *Triple Play Baseball* at Electronic Arts.

Chris went on to create the highly acclaimed RTS, *Total Annihilation*, at Cavedog Entertainment. After completing the expansion pack, *The Core Contingency*, he decided to start his own company. Chris founded Gas Powered Games in May of 1998 in Kirkland, WA. GPG released its first title, *Dungeon Siege* for the PC in April of 2002. Chris and Gas Powered Games have established themselves as an innovator in both technology and gameplay, and are now working on the next round of games to be released in the near future.

CHRIS TAYLOR:

GAS POWERED GAMES

Gas Powered Games was founded in May 1998 by industry veteran Chris Taylor. NAG was offered an opportunity to visit their studio in Redmond USA last month, to meet with one of the industry's gaming icons.

A PART FROM THE POSTERS in the reception area, Gas Powered Games looks pretty much like any other office environment. I am waiting for Chris Taylor, the brains behind games such as *Total Annihilation* and *Dungeon Siege I and II*. Not surprisingly, he is a busy man and when he finally arrives for our meeting, he takes me on a tour of the studio.

Walking through the open-plan offices (there are various sections throughout the floor on which they are on) I am amazed at how normal everything looks. Most of the employees are young - I guess about 27 on average. Almost all of the desks have dual 20-inch monitors, some have more. It is evident that these people are working on

something special. I was only given a sneak peak at *Supreme Commander*, but Chris tried to keep me from seeing too much. The wire frame models also did not give me much to report on, but I caught a sneak peak at some of the in-game footage and it looked very impressive.

For the most part, things are pretty normal at Gas Powered Games, including the equipment they use. "Most of our rigs are pretty standard. They generally consist of three gig processors with a couple of gigs of RAM and dual 20-inch monitors," Chris mentions while showing me the first studio. "We also do not put anything such as SCSI or RAID into our machines, except for our video editing systems,

unless of course we are doing specific video work on these workstations. Our average development machine, without monitor, cost about \$2,000. They also do not use any special video cards. We basically use what the hardware maker sends us with the machine because we want to play the game on consumer machines with ordinary graphics cards," Chris says. "It also functions as another level of compatibility testing. In fact, most machines currently have 64MB or 128MB graphics cards." Further down the corridor we get to the kitchen. There are two fully stocked cold drink fridges with everything from Dr Pepper to Mountain Dew for the employees to enjoy. They also have a couple of coffee machines standing on the counter. Around the corner they have various boxes of chocolate bars and an assortment of dried fruits and nuts. "If only all offices had a setup like this," I think to myself while munching on some M&Ms. Right next to the kitchen is the Supreme Commander meeting room. "In here we have a pretty beefy Dell XPS system. I really wanted it to be a great looking machine instead of some beige box" Chris says with a mouthful of nuts.

Down the corridor we get to Frank Bry's office. He is the sound engineer. "How do you guys develop the sounds for your games. I mean, do you use the old wooden block technique to simulate foot steps, for example?," I ask. Well Frank has done a lot of that, but he also uses special sound effects software and sound libraries. He also creates his own sound effect libraries - if he is going to see an F-15 fly over, for example, he'll grab his microphone and record the sound.

Around the corner we walk into another open-plan office where they are working on Supreme Commander. Sadly there are not many people working on the game the day that I am here. "Most of the staff is on time management training," Chris says as he heads to one of the developers working on a map for Supreme Commander. There is not much for me to see though, as most of the buildings and units on the maps are replaced with place-holder graphics. "This game should be released towards the end of next year," Chris adds.

The next office section we walk into is the art team for Dungeon Siege II. The first desk as you walk into this office is the desk of Randy Post (www.rkpost.net). "Randy has an obsession with skulls," Chris says with a smile on this face. And that is no joke. His desk displays various animal and human skulls and skeletons. "These are real skulls" he assures me - he uses them for the graphics he works on.

Moving back towards the reception area, I get a last chance to ask Chris a couple of final questions before he needs to head to another meeting.

How will Gas Powered Games support the mod-culture for Dungeon Siege II?

"We are releasing our development tools much like we did for the original Dungeon Siege - the Siege Editor, some utilities, and documentation, this time through our Gas Powered Garage Website [garage.gaspowered.com] with its forums and articles."

Can you talk a bit about the embedded mobile game features in Dungeon Siege II?

"Ah, yes. We worked closely with Intel to provide that

support. We have a low battery icon that lets you know when your battery's almost drained, without having to tab out of the game. Although I don't have the details of the rest of the features on hand, I can tell you that we are very interested in continuing to support mobile computing devices (i.e. laptops) because more and more laptops are capable of playing games."

What do you plan to do after Supreme Commander?

"We are working on some new concepts. One is the continuation of the Dungeon Siege universe and the other is a completely different game from anything we have ever done before."

What future do you see for MMORPG games?

"They are clearly the future, and although the way they are designed will change dramatically over time, I suspect that almost every game made will have strong multiplayer components and community elements. Playing games with others has proven time and time again to be more fun than playing alone."

Where does the name Gas Powered Games come from?

"I came up with the name because I have always felt that the gas powered version of something (i.e. RC cars, weed whackers, etc.) was always more powerful than the electric equivalent. I also really like the acronym!"

What games do you like to play, personally?

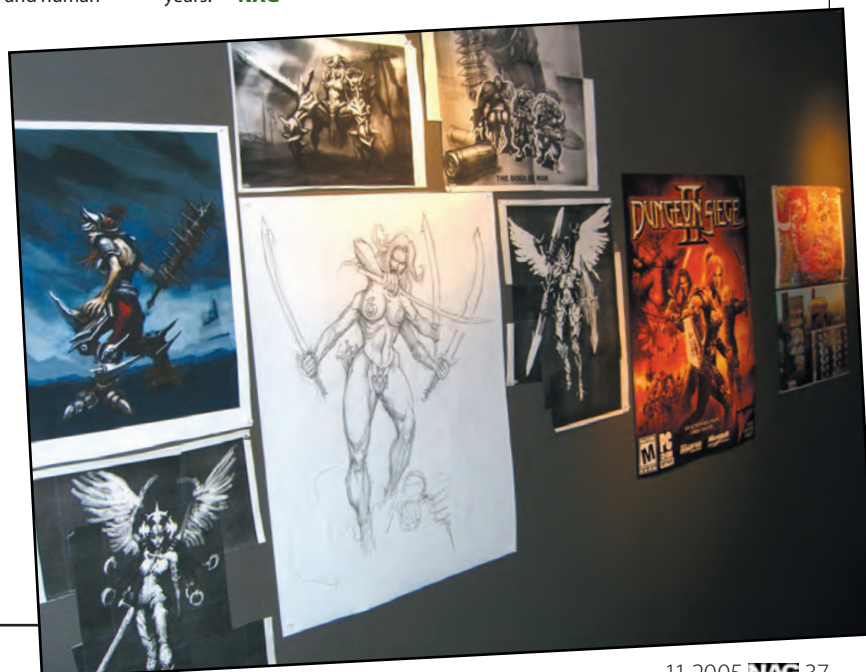
"I really enjoyed Battlefield 1942, and have just started playing BF2. I like strategy games and RPGs, and recently finished the demo of F.E.A.R., and am really looking forward to that."

What is your favourite gadget?

"My Treo 650 and Sony PSP!"

Do you see yourself developing games for the rest of your life?

"I don't know about the rest of my life, but definitely for another 10 to 15 years." **NAG**

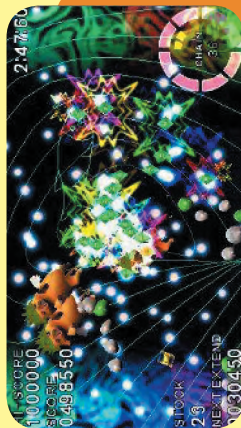




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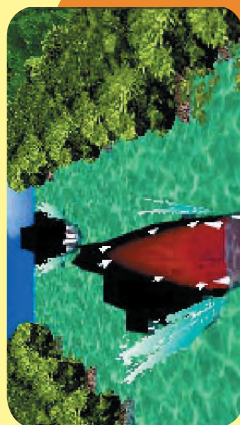
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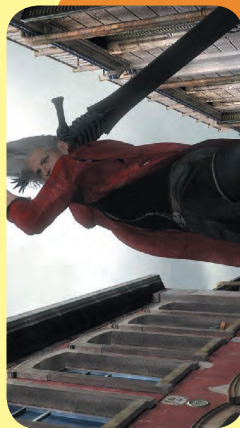
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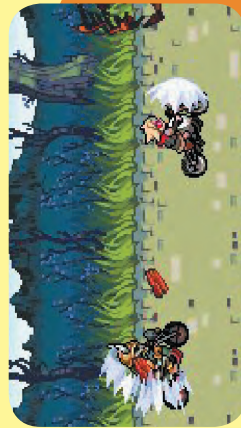
OKAMI PS2



DEAD RISING 360



METAL GEAR ACID 2 PSP



BOKTAI 3 GBA

FORGET E3. FORGET ANY other games show out there. If the hype about it is right, the Tokyo Game Show has become the new hot and happening place on the game promotion circuit. The show is traditionally much smaller than E3 – TGS 2004 had around 500 PC and console games on show versus E3 2005's 1,000 new ones. But it boasted much higher numbers, partly because the latter days of the event allows the public to come in and see the products for themselves. It's also become the place for the really big and interesting game announcements.

Microsoft and Sony used E3 to reveal their new consoles, but Nintendo decided to forego its own Japanese Spaceworld event to make a rare appearance at TGS. After Microsoft's Robbie Bach explained the 360's plan for Japan, which is a vital yet elusive market for the console, Nintendo bigwig Saturo Iwata revealed what everyone wanted to know – what will the Revolution controller look like? As it turns out, Nintendo wasn't kidding. The Revolution controller is unlike anything you've seen before (see our closer look on this controller on page 146). It definitely stole the show and most TGS coverage focused on the new hardware, even though no games demonstrating its abilities were on hand.

TGS was also the expansion platform for Sony's PlayStation 3. After wowing crowds (and causing a lot of scepticism) with the videos at E3, TGS handed more to fans. But contrary to earlier rumours, there was no playable code for any PS3 games. Still, the demo shown of Metal Gear Solid 4 by Hideo Kojima was reportedly interactive, so perhaps those visuals are actually the real deal. The MGS 4 trailer was, as usual, pretty long and has prompted jokes of Geriatric Snake, but the graphics were simply amazing. Alas, the trailer suggested ideas of an FPS MGS, but sadly shot that down soon



NINJA GAIDEN BLACK 360



PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 360



GENJI 2 PS3



EXTREME GHOSTS 'n GOBLINS PSP



RUMBLE ROSES XX 360



DDIRGE OF CEREBUS PS2

大喧嘩ス! 大喧嘩ス!

Tokyo Game Show 2005

afterwards. Sony sought to pimp a few of its other games as well. The most exciting new arrival has to be Devil May Cry 4 for the PS3. Frankly, we can't think of any better reason right now to get a PS3 than a high-resolution Dante stirring trouble. The video didn't reveal much at all, but once again the graphic fidelity was beyond impressive.

Microsoft did a decent job to woo the Japanese press and public. Games like Gears of War and Project Gotham 3 made an impact and Microsoft showed off Tetsuya Mizuguchi's Ninety Nine Nights for the 360, a game that is definitely out to get the Far East more interested in Microsoft's consoles. It is Mizuguchi's first non-rhythm game though (his other titles include Rez, Space Channel 5 and Lumines), so it's a bit of a wild card. But Mizuguchi rhythm fans can look forward to Every Extend Extra (E3). Every Extend was a free game developed by a Japanese kid in which you detonated yourself when swarmed by enemies. The chain reaction gave players bonuses, including extra life; so the bigger the bang the better. Every Extend shows Mizuguchi's involvement with synced music, cool gameplay effects and other surprises PSP owners can try out when the game is released. DS fans are also not left out in the cold. One definite must-have will be Project Rub 2: Where Do Babies Come From? It's a quirky game, so expect a more detailed preview in the future, but suffice to say it embraces the DS' touch screen perfectly.

The hit of an unusually exciting TGS? One could say the Revolution controller, but MGS 4: Guns of the Patriots took the limelight. Being a real-time demonstration of the PS3 and a new Metal Gear Solid game, everyone loved it. NAG still prefers seeing more of the jaw-dropping Resident Evil 5, but that's us. We fell out of favour of crawling around in boxes and eating jungle critters a while ago. **NAG**



Riding the Backwater

STRANGELY ENOUGH, THE GAMING community in South Africa is one of the most diverse in the world. Within our boundaries, we have communities for almost all of the competitively supported titles, as well as many more that aren't featured in tournaments. We play the Quakes, the Unreals, the 'Crafts, the Battlefields, the Command and Conquers, the FIFAs, the Counter-Strikes, the DoDs, the Doods – you name it, we play it. But as impressive as that is for a third world country, it's also one of the main reasons for our poor competitive performance.

Diversity is a problem. Our gaming community is tiny as it is, and having our players spread over such a wide area is only making things worse. Our weakness is primarily numbers, and we should be doing everything we can with the resources that we have. For a change I'll get straight to the point: if we're to remedy the situation, everybody should switch to the same game. Easier said than done, of course. Getting Unreal players to try anything that looks like Counter-Strike, or getting Counter-Strike players to touch anything that isn't Counter-Strike, is a tough ask. But everyone should at least be considering it. There are two titles, one currently being played and the other to be released soon, that South African gamers could make a conscious effort to switch to.

The first is CS: Source. Non-CS players balk at the mere mention of the name – and with good reason – but Source is not CS 1.6. It uses a smoother, more refined engine, which eliminates the annoyance factor that drove many Quakers and Unreal players, including myself, to dislike CS in the first place. The best thing about Source is that the international community is being just as stubborn as the local players about switching to it. In spite of this, we can be fairly assured that it'll last as a competitive title, even if it takes another year or two to gain sufficient popularity. Valve is behind it. The WCG are behind it. It would be an investment for the future, and as things stand we would have a good chance of getting a significant head start on the international teams.

The second title we could switch to, assuming it's decent, is Quake 4. If every member of the South African competitive community plays it, we would become skilled very quickly. It will be primarily a one-versus-one game, and less effort is required to push one player to the highest level than to push a team of five. Proof of this can

be found in players such as Stephen "Ph4ntom" Cloete (Quake III) and Nico-Louis "Mielie" Joubert (UT2004), who have both performed far better than the Counter-Strikers. Sure, not everybody likes duel-based gameplay – I, for one, prefer team games – but with a thriving local community, there will be a thriving local TDM (team death match) scene as well. And, as we can see from international examples such as Fox and Toxic (from Swedish team Ice Climbers), TDM play naturally boosts many elements of duel play.

Counter-Strike: Source might be a good short-term choice, but when the rest of the world finally catches up, we will probably be left behind again. Quake 4, then, may be the most viable option with all things considered. With its selection as the official duel game for the Cyberathlete Professional League 2006 World Series, it has already been picking up interest from gamers of all backgrounds, locally and internationally. But regardless of which title we choose, unity is without a doubt the way forward for South African gaming. **NAG**

“If every member of the South African competitive community plays [Quake 4], we would become skilled very quickly. It will be primarily a one-versus-one game, and less effort is required to push one player to the highest level than to push a team of five.”



The views and opinions cited in this column do not necessarily reflect those of NAG Magazine and its staff.

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ON SALE 2 NOVEMBER 2005



Its Called Innovation, You Imbeciles

OKAY, SO. WE ALL know why we're here. That's right. This whole thing is about the Revolution controller. Nintendo finally unveiled its mystical super-secret controller and so far the response has been mixed. Some people haven't stopped smiling, whereas other people don't get what the fuss is about.

Well, I'm going to tell you what the fuss is about. Now before you accuse me of being a Nintendo fan boy... Oh, too late. You've already done it, haven't you? Regardless, calling me a fan boy won't change the simple facts.

Nintendo actually has a winner on its hands with its new gyroscopic-sensing TV-remote-style controller, despite what you might think. I'm not saying this idly either, I'm drawing this conclusion based on a super-sized amount of facts, figures, by looking at existing markets and examining past trends. *[Thumb sucking? Ed]*

Nintendo has habitually released products that raised the querying eyebrows of consumers and watchdogs alike, yet those products have, without fail, become successful ventures. On occasion, said products have even become the industry standard (such as the analogue controller).

Now I'm sure you're thinking: "Miktar, get on with it and tell us why you think, in your high and oh-so-mighty opinion, the Revolution controller will be a success? After all, it's just a TV remote that interfaces with an upcoming console that won't be nearly as powerful as the PlayStation 3 or Xbox 360."

I can sum it up into one simple word. Okay, two words, perhaps three depending on how anal you are about word construction: Peripheral Gameplay.

Now I'm pretty damn sure that most of you out there don't have a clue what I mean when I say 'peripheral gameplay', so let me list a few games here. Percussion Freaks 9th Mix, Guitar Freaks, Dance Dance Revolution, Para Para Paradise, House of the Dead 3, Sega Bass Fishing. If you have never heard of any of those games, then you're depriving yourself. Peripheral games are games that require specialised controllers to work. Percussion Freaks, for example, uses a drum-set as its input device. Guitar Freaks, naturally, uses a distilled guitar (three buttons and a fret) as its interface.

Peripheral games have been highly successful the world over, because they represent something

out of the ordinary. Each game has its own unique controller and thus, its own unique learning curve. Unlike playing first-person shooters constantly, a new peripheral-based game has its own unique set of rules and challenges the player to not just learn the game, but the controller as well.

That's what Nintendo is capitalising on. As the Xavix console (extremely popular in the East) has proven, peripheral-based games appeal to a much wider user-base than your conventional PC or console titles. Nintendo has realised this and instead of competing against Sony and Microsoft (which would be suicidal), it has decided to go carve out its own market, and bring in all the people who aren't interested in Sony's new expensive 'not a toy' console, or Microsoft's 'hip and trendy' Xbox. The Revolution controller represents an 'all in one' peripheral device, capable of being a sword, or fishing rod, or anything the developers can think up. It can be a multitude of things, but most importantly... it is a friendly looking, familiar looking device that the world already knows.

Once again, Nintendo has created something that you may think is retarded, but will soon prove to be the smartest damn thing ever, not just from an innovation point of view, but from a 'you didn't know you needed this until we made it' angle.

Go ahead, call me a fan boy. But you'll see I'm right. **NAG**



Nintendo has habitually released products that raised the querying eyebrows of consumers and watchdogs alike, yet those products have, without fail, become successful ventures. On occasion, said products have even become the industry standard (such as the analogue controller).

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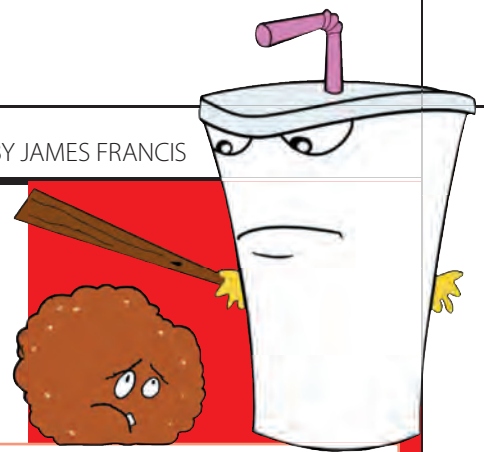
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Where have all the good games gone?



MY ROOMMATE IS MAKING his way through *Outcast*, the 1999 Voxel-pushing game that wowed the few who had chips above 300MHz. It managed to tear him away from *Far Cry* in HDR mode, which is very impressive; the kind of thing I last saw when hardware T&L was introduced. It's a gem and an astounding piece of technology. Every now and then the guy would scream about some new technology, like bump-mapping. Or I would demand how a game that old could have such nice water (comparatively). But in general, it's the overall package - for its time, *Outcast* was outstanding.

But we got too caught up with the revolution that pushed gameplay aside for a while. 3D has stormed the gates in the guise of the Quake and Unreal engines, the N64 and PlayStation. Yes, there were those who had come before, but this was 3D's main charge. Since those, things have never been the same. Hey, that's not a bad thing. FPS would really suck if it weren't 3D. The same goes for car games. Some stuff just can't be in 2D - even *Outcast* was 3D.

But did the whole sweep have to be so dominant? 3D completely tanked everything in its way and the complicated genres like RTS only held out because of the power they required. Once again, no complaints. 3D RTS is a superior genre. Sorry folks, but if *Civilisation 4* turns out to be the third game with more 3D, no one's going to complain too much. I was annoyed when *Locomotion*, *Transport Tycoon*'s sequel, still stuck to a sprite-based engine instead of using at least some 3D or 2.5D technology.

But we still took it too far. 3D brought some great things along, but it also made things easier for bad developers. Or it just made developers lazy. I don't know, but in a lot of respects the games today stink in a way. We're doing the current stuff really well, but we're not branching out of the genres we have enough of. Things are getting stagnant and developers are generously mixing current genres into each other. But few bother to explore new ground.

That one reason why I loved the *Chronicles of Riddick* is because it broke new ground. A highly playable extension of a universe I have an interest in, but could only experience through movies. King Kong got me with the same sense of anticipation,

because if done right, it will be like living the movie. That's a new thing - proper immersion into another form of entertainment.

But we don't see much of that. There are some examples - rarities like *Rez*, the upcoming *Shadow of the Colossus* and the excellent morbid *Silent Hill* series. Earlier I was reading an interview with Roger Avary, the script writer for the *Silent Hill* movie (he and the director also worked on *Crying Freeman*). *Silent Hill* might be a big deal, providing the studios don't butcher it. He says that film is passive and developers should realise that they can do so much more with games. I agree and perhaps we'll start seeing the original zest for ideas we saw with 2D. Has 3D matured enough to get to this point? Hell, yes. It's about time we start seeing something new. **NAG**

“3D brought some great things along, but it also made things easier for bad developers. Or it just made developers lazy. We're doing the current stuff really well, but we're not branching out of the genres we have enough of.”



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INBOX

[LETTER OF THE MOMENT]

FROM Byt3

SUBJECT Old and new

Hey, thanks a ton for the great magazine and cover DVD. You guys are really taking strides forward, and this relates to the argument I shall embark upon. Gamers nowadays seem to be constantly reminiscing about the games of the past and the gaming machines of the past, so much so that they seem to forget about what the future holds. The future is all about possibilities, not the past. Games of the past had their moment among every gamer, but it's the future that you should look forward to. Maybe this is why very little thought goes into the originality and story of all games being created these days. Maybe if we stopped remembering the past and instead looked to the future, there might be whole new categories of originality and innovation to behold.

You've hit the nail on the head with this letter. I do think that nostalgia is very overrated when it comes to games – just try playing some of your vintage favourites to see what I mean. If only embracing the future was commercially viable, we'd see a lot more innovation and originality when it comes to gaming. Give it time though; these things tend to evolve naturally. **NAG Ed.**

FROM mR_eLUSIVe

SUBJECT None given

You see it's my mom – she doesn't like us to hold LAN parties! My dad always says yes and he already bought a table for four computers. My friends usually jump up and down when I announce that my dad said yes for another LAN party, but then we put on our long faces when my mom says no. What can I do?

I'm going to go out on a short limb here and guess that after your 'LAN party' the room it was held in and the rest of the house looks like a toilet, which your mom invariably has to clean up on the weekend, not to mention making or ordering food for you and all your friends knowing that you're going to be up all night making a noise and preventing her from getting some well deserved rest [dad's probably on the couch already by the sounds of things so he doesn't care]. And staying up all night means sleeping all day which limits opportunities for important family interaction and visiting granny on Sunday [let's not forget having to explain to the other mothers why their children are half dead and smell like stale popcorn]. And to top it all off, you've probably got a buddy, let's call him Dave for the sake of this example, who has more porn on his hard drive than is natural and also

has exclusive access to an obscure FTP server somewhere with all the games and movies you care to mention – remember, it's not at all obvious when you lot suddenly jump up from a single screen that you're all crowded around the second mom walks into the 'LAN venue'. So you see, even though dad is playing the good guy here and buying the table, he probably also wants in on the Dave action and you still wonder why mom is being so difficult.

NAG Ed.

the Russian boy then don't include the fitness section. Including a fitness section will increase the average lifespan of the gamer and he will have more hours of gaming pleasure.

Now there's an untapped genre if I ever heard of one – bodybuilding games, what fun. In terms of a health and fitness section I'm going to have to file this in bin 13. Your concept is good. Getting gamers to live longer to play and buy more games. But the reality is most older [60+] people don't play games much, so we'd rather burn them out early to maximise the amount of time they play now. Besides, gamers are a renewable source when it comes to consumers. So why plan for the future when you can monopolise on the present. **NAG Ed.**

FROM Not sure

SUBJECT You work hard? Never

Yes, I understand that working at NAG is hard. But seriously, I read about three to four, sometimes even five magazines a month, and not one of those magazines has ever mentioned how hard they work or the amount of pressure they have to deal with on a monthly basis. Yes, I am sure many hardcore gamers get on your nerves picking up every mistake you make and watching you like a hawk, but somehow every other magazine manages to cope with it. Take Sports Illustrated or <name of magazine removed> for example. Sports Illustrated has lots of fanatic sports fans and if those guys at Sports Illustrated make a mistake, they might endure a beating from angry sports fans. The other example, <name of magazine removed> is a bit of a copy paste job, but still they somehow don't ever mention how hard it is pressing Ctrl + C and Ctrl + V. So, if most other magazines can handle their work and cope with the pressure why can't NAG? You guys are good game reviewers, but you don't work yourselves to death every weekend. So come on, please tell me why you always have to mention how hard you work, and Miktar always says, "I simply don't have the time". If other magazines can deal with it why can't you?

Just FYI – we certainly can handle the pressure or there'd be no NAG each month, and we bitch because we do work hard and don't have enough time to play games. Bitching is part of being a gamer [just like your letter]. So if we didn't bitch about everything, you wouldn't respect us anymore. Now for the technical side of things. NAG is an original publication, so every word, picture etc. isn't copied or cut and pasted from somewhere else [I don't think there's more than 20 publications in the whole country that actually write their own stuff these days, rather relying on the UK or USA for their opinions and comments]. NAG is a cutting edge magazine requiring last minute changes to major sections each month, meaning we don't have the luxury of completing a magazine two months ahead of our on-shelf date like everyone else – not to mention the DVD. We're also a small and highly skilled team and don't



The 'Letter of the Moment' prize is sponsored by EA Africa. The winner receives 2 games for coming up with the most eclectic chicken scratch



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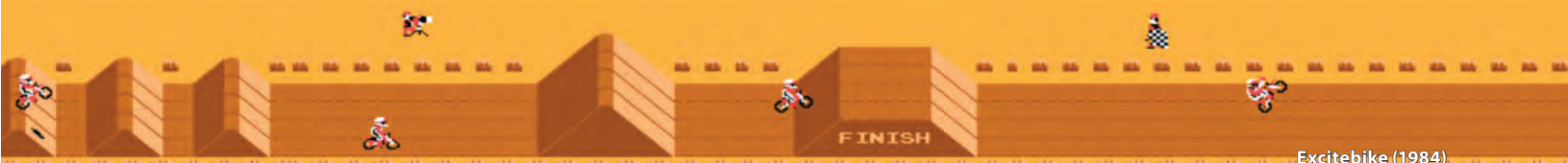
Important: Include your details when mailing us or how will you ever get your prize if you win...

There is a new rule for those of you sending in any artwork for publication. Your submission must include the NAG logo or one of our magazine covers [download @ www.nag.co.za] built into the image somewhere – and by 'built in' we mean not pasted or stuck on somewhere – built in. You real artists will know what we're talking about – no logo / cover – no fame. NAG logo on CD.

FROM Lourens

SUBJECT Bodybuilders?

There is a sports game for everything these days. You can find table tennis, pool, deer hunting and even chess. Now those aren't the biggest of sports and yet they have one or even more titles out. So why aren't there any bodybuilding games out? They can make the graphics amazing and yes a lot of people will buy it and make a huge bodybuilder forgetting about their own weight problems. Better yet, why doesn't NAG include a little bodybuilding or exercise section in the magazine? You always say how you are taking care of South African gamers, but if you want half of the gamers to die like



Excitebike (1984)

have hundreds of people to do everything for us. This is the same team that does SA Computer Magazine, rAge and the CitiEdge supplement. So yes, I think we're due a little bitching occasionally, but we still love what we do and wouldn't change it for anything in the world [except perhaps James who secretly desires a sabbatical in Cambodia – clearing mine fields. Don't ask]. **NAG Ed.**

FROM Edward van Niekerk

SUBJECT Online Role-Playing Games

I play World of Warcraft. It's a really good game - granted it has a few cons - but it's addictive and plain fun. I've met lots of great people and, it being my first online RPG, it's awesome to have someone quickly stop to heal you while you're fighting a basilisk (or something). I really enjoyed playing the Dungeon Siege 2 demo, but I didn't even finish it, because I went back to Warcraft. I really want to play Guild Wars as well. But here's my problem. I'm so used to playing a game and finishing it, I don't think I really grasp the mechanics of a game like Warcraft. Many people say the game really begins when you hit level 60 (the max). I want to play Dungeon Siege 2 and Guild Wars, but I don't want to lessen my play time for Warcraft. I know it sounds freaky, but there you have it. All these great games I want to play, but I can't stop playing one. Might be because I pay to play and feel I have to use what I paid for. Ugh, maybe I'm thinking too much and should rather try them all and play the one I enjoy the most?

I'm having the same problem with Battlefield 2 - just can't stop playing this game for some reason. It's ruining my life and it only gets worse when a new patch arrives... Help me!

NAG Ed.

FROM PCK

SUBJECT This month's letter's page!

All I have to say about your magazine is: awesome, great, phenomenal, outstanding, and brilliant and keep it up. To hell with what other people think.

I like you. Can we be friends? **NAG Ed.**

FROM Rudolph

SUBJECT Miktar's Moaning

After reading the latest offering from Mr. Miktar Dracon in the August issue of NAG, I couldn't help but notice the same bitter negativity oozing from his opinion page as that illustrated by the late Ramjet. Regarding his view of the PC being 'dead' - come on. Go to any organised LAN event and you'll witness first hand that the PC is far from being 'obsolete' gaming-wise. Hell, if that was the case, why does NAG still bother being involved with rAge? Why are international tournaments still being held? It's not a case of PC gaming becoming extinct, but more like a market being overwhelmed with companies jump-

ing on the console bandwagon in trying to illustrate their vision of 'future gaming'. Listening to the specification of the Xbox 360, it sounds more like a PC than a console anyway. I believe that PC gaming is an evolutionary process - why else would big name developers still be creating games for it? I also don't really care about his issues with Sony, his labelling of SA gamers as being lazy, and especially his rambling on about gaming forums falling prey to 'idiotic misinformation'. All I'm asking is some gaming issue substantive and worthy of argument. Every person has a right to their own opinion, but when that opinion starts losing momentum, you should ask yourself if you haven't fallen into a cycle of moaning instead of creating meaning. It got to Ramjet and we all know what happened to him...

I'll let you in on a little secret about Miktar. He's not from around here [he's an interbred cross-cultured Hungarian Yugoslav with a hint of simian] and is the only person on the planet that can find merit in any game he plays. James actually wrote the article about the death of the PC by the way, probably because he's generally obsessed with dead things [zombies in particular]. My advice is to not read the opinion columns - they're usually written at the last minute and most of the stuff in there is made up anyway. **NAG Ed.**

FROM Dave

SUBJECT Want to know what the scroll lock does

Did you know that the Scroll Lock key performs a very useful function in Microsoft Excel? Go ahead, try it. Open an Excel spreadsheet, then hit Scroll Lock (it may creak from years of idleness!). Now press the Down Arrow key. Notice how you can scroll through your spreadsheet, without changing your current cursor position - very useful for searching for data further down in the spreadsheet without losing your place. There's also a little application called PopUp Killer that makes ingenious use of the key. Want to temporarily disable the application and allow pop-ups to appear in your Web browser? Easy, just hit Scroll Lock! Better yet, if you forget whether you left Scroll Lock on or off, the friendly LED indicator reminds you!

That's strange. When I press Scroll Lock nothing happens in terms of lights coming on, but I did discover a new key the other day, the 'F Lock'. Pressing this makes the F light come on and off. I hope this was as exciting for you as your mail was for me. **NAG Ed.**

FROM Carel

SUBJECT Why?

What do you think about the number pad? Its only use is for calculating numbers. So don't you think it would be cheaper to make keyboards if they took it out?

You know you're right. I don't think I've ever actually used the number pad. If they remove it, I think keyboards would

look a little bare on that side, don't you? Perhaps they can replace it with something we could actually use, like a little mirror or cup holder. If any of you have any suggestions for what could replace the number pad, send mail to letters@nag.co.za. This is assuming of course we don't just make the keyboard shorter. **NAG Ed.**

FROM Mik

SUBJECT Bang for your buck

I'm going to admit to doing some illegal activity, but it all serves to prove my argument. When they released GTA: San Andreas on PS2 last year, I couldn't wait for them to bring it out on PC. So I waited and waited a little more. Then finally the light at the end of the tunnel appeared and all I had to do was wait another month after the overseas release date for it to arrive in good old SA. I just couldn't do it. So I downloaded it, cracked it and installed it. (Insert slap on wrist here.) And it was all I wanted it to be and more. Slowly, it began creeping up on me - there's no need to spend 300 bucks on it now, I already have it and can use that cash to buy some other game. So some days went by, I got a little further in the game and all was peachy... until I saw the actual game as it was being sold in the shops. I didn't hesitate. I picked it up, slapped down the debit card and walked out 300 bucks poorer. Now, I still haven't installed my legit copy - I just haven't gotten around to it yet. So why did I buy it anyway? Two words that would, if embraced properly, put a serious damper on piracy: Game Packaging. San Andreas is undoubtedly the best packaged game ever. It has its own custom made box/book (no cheap, plastic DVD case), a neat cardboard cover, and a brilliantly put together City Guide (not to mention the poster and full map on reverse) that adds to the entire experience of playing the game. I read the guide from cover to cover and spent hours driving around San Andreas looking for the recommended restaurants, the World's Biggest Cock, places to base jump etc., and not because it helped me to get further in the game, but because I could see that somebody had put that much more effort into creating the game. So what's my point? The packaging and effort that went into it is what sold me the game. So in future, why don't software companies go the extra mile and give us a little more for the cash we fork out? I know I'd buy even more games than I already do.

You make a very good point. I do believe that if publishers and developers spent more time on their packaging, manual and small things like maps, guides and even plastic models you'd find more people buy originals. I guess people want more goods for their money even if the 'goods' are cheap plastic spaceships. I think there should be a rule that you should get a minimum of four cool things in any game box over and above the actual CDs or DVD and please just not a T-shirt. **NAG Ed.**



THE MATRIX ONLINE

www.matrixonline.com

C:\> MatrixOnline.exe - reloaded
Loading...

* Jacking into the Matrix...again

I'm a Red Pill. I've opened my eyes to the truth and embraced it. I've come to accept that my entire existence before was a lie. McDonalds isn't real food, just simulated food made to taste that way. Britney Spears isn't a real person, just a program written to placate the masses. I've decided to ally with Zion, fighting against the Exiles and maintaining the fragile peace we have with The Machines.

> Day 2... Execute

Due to the Matrix Online (MxO) having a rollback (data was corrupt, so they had to go to an earlier backup), my character never existed. Creating a new character wasn't much of a chore, since the character creation system is quite streamlined and enjoyable. The clichéd sense of déjà vu is unmistakable, though.

Once in the game, there is a very strong core idea that most players try to get across in the Matrix Online. That idea is that people should play MxO for the story and not just to level characters and find new items. MxO has been designed around continuing the plot the movies laid down, and in this idea it succeeds. The strong story backbone to MxO helps keep things interesting, and fans of the movie will be thrilled to meet up with characters from the movie and actually participate in scenes created by the MxO Live Team (events that have actors playing characters from the movie in the game).

Welcome back, Mr Anderson.

Regardless, MxO is still a game and thus needs certain elements to make it entertaining beyond the scope of playing an interactive movie.

Missions are handled in a rather interesting way. You contact your operator via your cellphone in the game, and the operator will assign you a mission. Your mission area is usually inside a building, perhaps a specific apartment. Once you accept the mission, that apartment can only be entered by you. You can party up with other players to attempt a mission as a team, which is highly recommended.

To keep in touch with your friends in the game, MxO had the AOL Instant Messenger client built in (but not any more, due to Sony taking over the game). It now uses the Sony Online chat system which just doesn't work as well.

> Day 14

As you progress through MxO and start climbing up your chosen skill tree (either as a Combatant, Hacker or Martial artist), more and more options become available to you. Once I was awarded the Hyper Jump ability, the game became a lot more manageable. Using Hyper Jump, you can jump



from rooftop to rooftop, avoiding the smaller gangs that roam the streets below and generally annoy the players. Hyper Jump helps you get to your mission areas quicker, letting you progress faster through the plot.

We've missed you.

The Interlock combat system manages to work in fights other than one on one, except that combatants still essentially take turns fighting single opponents. While this does allow a certain level of control, it removes the more chaotic elements from large fights.

Progression through MxO allows you the choice of picking a side. Most people seem to ally with Zion, essentially the 'good guys'. You can also do missions for The Machines, which slowly changes your alliance values and changes how the inhabitants of certain parts of MegaCity respond to your presence. Lastly there are the Exiles, rogue programs such as the Oracle and The Merovingian whose faction can also provide you with missions.

> Day 23

Unfortunately for South Africans, Matrix Online is an extremely bandwidth-reliant game. If you don't have an unshaped ADSL account, you will not be able to play Matrix Online. Even with the best connection this country has to offer, you will still be hit with severe lag that really brings the game down.

Not helping matters is the recent acquisition of Matrix Online by Sony. Sony has moved all the accounts and systems over to their own Sony Online systems, which has impounded account changes, signups and other critical functionality. The whole move from the original systems to the new systems has been nothing short of agitating.

> Day 30

Much like your conventional MMORPG, Matrix Online suffers from the level-treadmill. There are times where you just have to button down the hatches and spend hours improving your character so you don't get completely destroyed when going up against certain opponents. If the idea of dedicating hours of your life to mindless experience hunting doesn't appeal to you, MxO might not be the right game for you.

NAG



PREVIEWS

WE WANT...



Serious Sam 2

What? We have to explain this one? Okay, the demo wasn't that great. It did feel limited and a bit weak, but give us more enemies, larger maps and those guns and we're happy. Funnily enough, that's exactly what we're expecting from Serious Sam 2 and somehow we doubt we'll be disappointed.



Call of Duty 2

The demo is out and we want it even more than before. Those who complain about too many war shooters seem to forget that it's a genre in its own right and this game will be the pinnacle of all the action. Call of Duty still remains the war game to beat – ironically, it might take its sequel to do so.



Nintendo Revolution

We're not giving up hope on getting our paws on the 360 or PS3, but we really want to see what this new Revolution and its remote-like controller can do. The big N certainly wasn't kidding when it said it wanted to change the way we play games. But will it work? We hope so...

EIGHT PAGES OF KING Kong? You might be tempted to say that's because we got a trip to New York as part of the deal. But we don't sell coverage that cheap. NYC landed the game four pages at most. The rest came from being impressed by it, especially since the talent behind Beyond Good & Evil is really pushing where this movie-game can go in terms of an experience. Watch the movie, play the game might finally mean something. In fact, all we're worrying about is that the movie might suck. You never know.

NINETY NINE NIGHTS



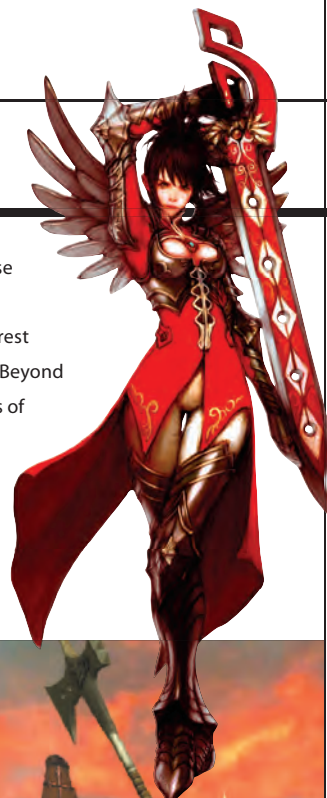
DEVELOPER Q Entertainment **PUBLISHER** TBA **PLATFORMS** 360 **RELEASE DATE** TBA

The 360 really needs its Japanese developers in this round if it hopes to make a dent in Sony's dominance. It's not that it didn't have any before, but there weren't enough of them. Still, it says something for MS if guys like Team Ninja and Q Entertainment are still sticking with them, despite the box's performance in Japan. Q, in fact, is working on this, and after the Kingdom Under Fire games, we really want to see what they pull off on the 360.

PRINCE OF PERSIA PSP

DEVELOPER Pipeworks **PUBLISHER** Ubisoft **PLATFORMS** PSP **RELEASE DATE** 2006

The porting legacy of the PSP continues. Warrior Within is getting the handheld treatment, so you can essentially expect the same game, but with a revamped control scheme, reworked levels and new puzzles, monsters and other changes amongst the regular stuff. It might not be ground-breaking, but it's a great gaming series and bound to be a kick on the PSP.



DARKSTAR ONE

DEVELOPER Ascaron **PUBLISHER** Ascaron **PLATFORMS** PC **RELEASE DATE** February 2006



After Sacred, Ascaron has our attention. Darkstar One is a break from tradition, though, as the company ventures into Space RPGs (in the vein of Freelancer and X-Beyond). Will they pull it off? It's tough to say, since this genre is becoming pretty common amongst European and Asian developers. But fans are always hopeful that one of these will pull off what Privateer, Wing Commander and the X games did.

METAL GEAR SOLID 4

DEVELOPER Konami **PUBLISHER** Konami **PLATFORMS** PS3 **RELEASE DATE** TBA



Alright, here we go again. Was the TGS video of MTG4 real or not? Apparently Kojima interacted with the demo (plus we don't want to think that Hideo might lie to us). Anyway, it looks stunning, even if you don't like Geriatric Snake. Let's just hope the game isn't as anal as the third MTG.

NEVEREND

DEVELOPER Mayhem Studios **PUBLISHER** Dusk2Dawn **PLATFORMS** PC, Xbox **RELEASE DATE** 2006



This game was first announced in 2002 and tentatively set for launch in 2004. Now it's eyeing a 2006 release so that more voices can be recorded for the Final Fantasy-style RPG. It uses the old nugget of rendered backgrounds with real-time characters, while battle scenes are in full 3D. It might not be very original, but it might give PC games that Final Fantasy experience they've been longing for.

TRUE CRIME: NEW YORK CITY

DEVELOPER Luxoflux **PUBLISHER** Activision **PLATFORMS** PS2, Xbox, GCN **RELEASE DATE** Q4 2005



It's got the voice cast, that's for sure. GTA's closest rival also took a leaf from the crime saga's book: when doing a sequel, change location. True Crime decided to stick to the real locations, hence moving to the East coast and the grime of New York. You'll play a cop again and expect large levels based on New York. Hey, if the gameplay is tweaked enough, this one might just impress everyone.

What we're playing at the NAG office ...



Bone

TellTale released the first episodic game in the Bone series and it's not bad. It's not great either, especially for the \$20 you pay for it. Hardcore adventure fans will be disappointed. Everyone else seemed to have loved it, though.



Burnout Revenge

Crash breaker! Burnout is back and Criterion didn't rest on its laurels. Apart from being much more tweaked and the awesome Revenge mode, the Crash Junctions are far more involved. Pity about the bugs, but you can't have your cake and eat it.



KOTOR 2

Our art director continues his quest to become a real Jedi by studying all that is a Star Wars RPG. Or perhaps he just digs the KOTOR series, which isn't hard when Bioware was behind a game. He's also been playing Tetris a lot, but that's because he makes a lame Jedi. All Jedi are lame. It's the Sith that rule.



RUMBLE IN THE JUNGLE

VITAL INFO

Platforms

PC PS2 PSP GBA XBOX
DS NCC

Developer

Ubisoft

Publisher

Ubisoft

Supplier

MegaRom [011] 234 2680

Genre

Action

Release Date

Q4 2005

COVER FEATURE - KING KONG

**KING KONG IS COMING TO TOWN, COURTESY OF PETER JACKSON,
AND THE KING KONG GAME IS ON ITS WAY TOO, COURTESY OF
MICHEL 'BG&E' ANCEL. CHECK OUT THE BEST GAME MOST GAMERS
WILL IGNORE, BECAUSE MOVIE GAMES ARE ALWAYS RUBBISH,
AREN'T THEY?**



THE MONKEY WAS FIRST. King Kong dragged Fay Wray up the Empire State Building nearly 21 years before Godzilla even showed his face in 1954. But the Japanese lizard has appeared in around thirty films. King Kong, on the other hand, has had pretty much nothing, bar a few sequels and one disastrous remake. Still, Peter Jackson has his reasons for this film: "From the moment I saw King Kong, I wanted to make films. It's the reason why I make films." So, after impressing New Line Cinema with coming through on their huge three-movies-in-one deal with Lord of the Rings (if LOTR flopped, it would have meant billions; the success also translated into billions), the bearded and bespectacled Jackson could pick and choose what to do next. It was to be King Kong, backed by the LOTR effects team, WETA.

BUT WE'RE TALKING ABOUT a game here. Why is a gaming magazine trying to sell you a movie? Well, movie games come in two styles: excellent and extremely bad. Excellent movie games could be counted on one hand if you are picky enough, but there are more abortive movie games out there than fertiliser on the bottom of a manure worker's shoes. With King Kong it is key to understand that the game wants to be the movie, not take a cheap-shot tour through the scenes. The biggest problem, perhaps, with movie games is that they are set on a story the player already knows. Games like Riddick got around this with its own storyline, but not all universes allow for this. King Kong certainly doesn't. But you play a movie game because you want to experience the movie. Riddick's main focus was the predatory killer himself, so it didn't matter much what story context it was in. As long as you got to

be Riddick and do Riddick stuff (with extreme prejudice). King Kong seems to be a pretty rich movie experience – it would be wasteful to take away from any of it.

Jackson, eager to have a game of the movie, solved this problem by approaching Michel Ancel. You might not have heard of him, but he was the mind and force behind the Rayman series, Sands of Time and Beyond Good & Evil. It also gave the King Kong game some gamer cred, as Ancel's involvement (whom Jackson approached after finishing Beyond Good & Evil) shifts the potential up quite a bit. "Going beyond the movie experience really excited me," Ancel explained. "We learned a lot with Beyond Good & Evil and I could see how that would work here." Jackson had his own reasons for a game version: "We want the two to come from the same universe. The game should take the audience further than the movie did. You have to survive in what is the most dangerous jungle on earth!"

ONE THING IS CERTAIN: King Kong the game is not a studio cash-in or an attempt to drive more money from the franchise (though it obviously is a factor). And as such, the game is significantly more polished and ironically more true to its movie origins than any other movie title. Riddick created its own niche by expanding on the universe. But King Kong wants to do what movie games in general are supposed to do: let you relive the movie experience in a new way. This means that players will adopt two roles: one as Adrian Brody's lead character, slogging through dangerous and creature-filled jungles across the island, and the other as Kong himself. The movie



places more focus than its predecessors on Kong as a character, so the game involves him quite often. But first there is the world this takes place in.

THE MOVIE IS FAIRLY faithful to the 1933 classic. A team goes to a remote jungle island where they discover a huge ape. Eventually he is taken back to New York, but the ape escapes and wreaks havoc before eventually being gunned down by military biplanes as he scales the Empire State Building. Most of the new movie and game take place on this jungle island. Thanks to today's effects, a lot of giant dinosaurs and insects, not to mention scores of pygmies and one big ape, come to life. It's a diverse island with swamps, deep foliage, rivers and rocky hills, peppered with tribal sites and hunting grounds and veined by countless tunnels and cave systems. The game delves into this rich environment, taking it all in. The first level we played had your character tied to a post as you see Anna being handed to Kong by the tribesmen. The same scene was shown during a short screening of the film and the game captures the moment perfectly, except this time it's from the perspective of the guy on the post down there. Tribal drums fill the air, savage chanting is everywhere, above your head are giant skulls carved out of the mountain glowing with lava pouring out of them. The restraining ropes creak as you try and move. Then you suddenly hear Anna scream as she is lowered and you look up into the night sky, stark with the smoke of the native fires, to see her suspended over a ledge. Then a huge ape looms over the ledge, grabs her and leaves. Soon after that, one of the characters (Jack Black) shows up and cuts you loose. Suddenly you run over a natural bridge as the natives rain arrows of fire on you. Here the game showed an interesting mechanic: if you ran and dodged for cover, you almost never got hit. But stand still long enough and a folly of arrows quickly take you out. So if a player tries to do something that breaks the moment, he gets taken out the same way it would have happened in the movie if a character tried it. But these events won't take out players who stick to the story. That's what the jungle is for.

WE'VE HAD OUR SHARE of jungles in games, but King Kong takes it to another place. Since most of the game is in a jungle, the development team had to create a lot of different foliage types and make sure that players can perceive the difference between areas without losing the feeling that you are in a place well beyond the conventions of weed-whackers. Then they filled it with a lot of dangerous things. The game will feature monsters not in



the movie, but were intended for the big screen version. WETA gave these to Ance and co. and also collaborated with them to get the monsters to what they would have been in the movie. Big bugs and dinosaurs are the biggest problems. Raptor-like predators roam the grounds in packs, while caves and smaller spaces are likely to be crowded with things like giant centipedes. T-Rexes seem to love the neighbourhood as well. If you ever wanted a game that involved a lot of running away from huge reptiles, this is it.

THE GAME DROPPED ANY HUD display. One button prompts the character to tell you how much ammo he has left, but that's it. Health slowly regenerates, so even though a lot of King Kong is a first-person experience, it's not a marathon shooter. Instead, a character can die quickly in a situation where he is overwhelmed, but a slow, timed fight usually works in your favour. The point is to encourage survival tendencies – rushing into something will get you killed, but using some logic can get you far. This is accommodated by a few elements. Players can use spears to set fire to certain types of grass (of which there are several) or to get bait, which can be used to distract predators. For instance, throwing a spear with a fish staked to it into a wall will attract all the surrounding centipedes to it. Flying reptiles (which attack you as well) can be shot down as a distraction for larger predators. Ammo and weapons are fairly limited - there are a handful including a pistol, rifle, machine gun, sniper rifle and something the developers referred to as a Molotov skull. You can only carry a few weapons and ammo is scarce, though a plane makes supply drops at certain points (the plane doesn't exist in the movie, but Jackson allowed the team to improvise where they needed something to compliment the gaming experience). So, thinking on your feet and using the environment (complete with plenty of spears and bones) is how you will survive.

THE JOURNEY WILL TAKE players through the key moments of the movie from a new perspective as well as new areas linking the events. One



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scene has all the team members trashing down a river on makeshift rafts as two T-Rexes are running along the banks, trying to grab a quick snack. As a human, players can't kill these big monsters. They tear through the scenery, snapping at your head. But follies of gunfire keep them at bay and when bullets are scarce there are also spears. There's also a pot of fire on the raft, so throwing a burning spear into grass ahead of the carnivore might also be a good idea. But you can't run forever. Sometimes you have to stand up for yourself. And nothing stands up for itself better than a huge ape.

KONG IS THE STAR of the movie, and a game without Kong but carrying his name, would just be a lie. A good chunk of King Kong puts the player in charge of this monkey. At the very least it is satisfying. The developer demonstrating the game, as Kong, leaps into a clearing with Anna. Pygmies are on platforms up a cliff, shooting arrows at you. To make things more complicated, there are two T-Rexes stomping around in front. Bad vibes are everywhere and clearly this is on. Kong drops Anna. The developer grabs a huge rock and lunges it at one of the platforms (all these events happen

while playing). Tribesmen plunge to their doom as the rock crushes their haven. Then Kong leaps forward and plunges a fist into the one T-Rex's head. The second storms at him, but he flanks its attack, pummeling it with his fists. Kong grabs its mouth and the developer frantically taps on the controller as Kong forces the dinosaur's jaws wider and wider. Suddenly it snaps and the beast falls limp. At this point, the other Rex rams Kong sending him through a rock wall. But our ape isn't through. He throws another rock at his adversary and then hurls yet another at the other arrow-releasing platform.

Kong's style is not survival; it is domination and full-blown fighting. This is his island and the ape had to crack some skulls to make it so. King Kong uses the Jade engine, seen in BG&E and Prince of Persia. Ance1 and his team developed Jade, so with King Kong they know what they are doing. Kong inherited the basics of the prince's athletics abilities - he navigates the jungle by swinging on vines, grabbing onto ledges and running up and along walls, along with fluid directional combat. It's not as demanding as POP was, but it gives the feeling of rampaging speed and power. Kong's parts are the exact



opposite from the survival nature of the first-person side. In the one you are running for your life from a Rex, in the other you snap its spine across your back (one of a few finishing moves). As with the FPS side, Kong has no HUD and his health regenerates, thus fights are lost because the player didn't do well enough. Thankfully, frequent checkpoints ensure that you don't fall too far behind. Kong's brawling is balanced with physical puzzles as well as a high level of interactivity with Anna. In one scene you have to get her up a ledge so that she can burn the thick thorn bushes at the top stopping you from climbing up. The first-person portion also has several supporting characters. But it appears you won't die because of them - they are good at staying alive and players will be left to worry more about themselves.

ONE THING THE TEAM really wanted in the game was adaptable difficulty. The game starts as standard for everyone, but depending on how well or poorly you play it changes to suit the situation. If a player spends too much time in a specific fight, the game will reduce the number of things attacking him. But on the flip-side, if a player does very well in the game, things get tougher and some creatures can even be unlocked if you are a lizard-eating survivalist. The idea is to create the same experience for different calibres of

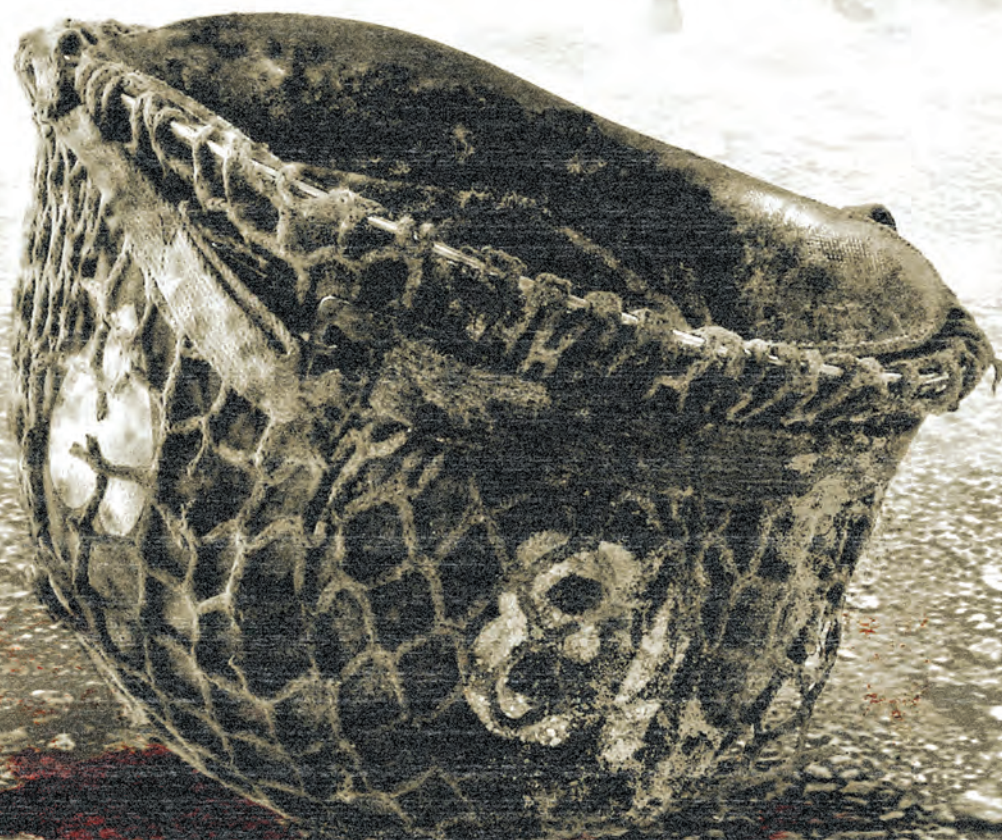
players, something seen before in some of Ance1's games. The code showed to us had the hallmarks of the system, but the team admitted it was far from complete, so it's not easy to gauge if King Kong would be too easy for hardcore gamers. The game is a bit short by conventional terms (developers estimate 12 to 15 hours mean game time), but this could be a lot shorter if it all proves easy. That mentioned; the areas we encountered in the game certainly weren't very forgiving and even as Kong you need to know what you are doing because death can come quickly.

IT'S ACTUALLY HARD TO put it across on paper, but we came from the King Kong conference pretty impressed - to the point that King Kong could be on the same level as the excellent Chronicles of Riddick. But only a few scenes of Kong's were shown and we never saw the New York levels, which make up roughly 10% of the game, according to the team. Kong could also be a miss. What Ance1 and Jackson are trying to do here is impressive, but it's also uncharted waters. If King Kong the game is what we hope it will be, it will be a definitive benchmark in movie games. After this you should never expect anything less from a film's game title again. But gamers have never had a problem with doing that anyway, thanks to the heaps of garbage movies have spewed into gamedom. Will King Kong change that? We think so. **NAG**

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KING KONG

THE MOVIE

WETA CHIEF RICHARD TAYLOR TALKS
ABOUT BRINGING PETER JACKSON'S
NEW EPIC TO LIFE.

THERE IS A STATUE of a ferocious King Kong in the reception area of the Weta Workshop on the outskirts of Wellington. But impressive though it is, this model isn't part of the painstaking preparation by the talented team that Peter Jackson has gathered to bring his vision of the movie classic to the screen. Instead, this Kong statue illustrates how long the project has occupied the thoughts and imagination of the Oscar winning director and his collaborators. It was actually made eight years ago - before the team embarked on the epic Lord of the Rings trilogy - when these filmmakers had originally intended to create a version of the 1933 movie about the giant gorilla.

A smiling Richard Taylor, the Oscar winning head of Weta Workshop Ltd, New Zealand's world famous special effects facility, and long-term collaborator with Peter Jackson, explains that he sculpted the model at a time when it looked like the plug was going to be pulled on the project. "I came in one Sunday afternoon and I could feel that things were getting a little bit dicey with Universal," says Taylor. The studio was having second thoughts about returning to the story of Kong because Godzilla and Mighty Joe Young were in production. This uncertainty was naturally causing huge concern for the New Zealand filmmakers who were committed to the project.

"For King Kong to fall over for us back then was a very dire thing," admits Taylor. "We had contracted our digital effects technicians to a very long



contract to do the film, to secure them. We had brought people in from around the world, we had established a group. We were about six months into manufacturing, we already had some animatronic creatures sculpted, most of the stock animation puppets were finished and it started to get wobbly. We could feel this undertow of uncertainty from the production." So on that Sunday morning eight years ago, Richard Taylor decided to take the bull by the horns and he made a small maquette of a sculpture of Kong. "The next morning I presented it to Peter and said: 'How about we sculpt this as a presentation piece to send to Universal to try and invest in them how exciting the moment could be'. So over the next couple of weeks I sculpted the piece and five weeks later it arrived at Universal. They were excited by it, and they actually put it in their front foyer. But needless to say, the film fell flat four weeks later. And Peter, in true Kiwi form, asked for the sculpture back. So we got it back, which I thought was cool." Now King Kong - starring Adrien Brody, Naomi Watts, Jack Black and Andy Serkis - is finally in production and keenly anticipated as the hottest movie of 2005.

AS RICHARD CONDUCTS A fascinating tour through the Weta Workshop, pointing out the various elements that will eventually become Skull Island, the jungle home of Kong, you can't help but be impressed by the fact that Taylor obviously gets a huge kick out of the work that is created by him and his team. And while he is having fun it's clear too that he is a perfectionist who

strives to make the impossible happen in his pursuit of the wonder of the movies. You are helped to appreciate the level of dedication when you learn that the Weta team have done two years of illustrative design work into the look of King Kong, and they've also complimented that with a significant amount of sculptural study. "We have done more maquetting that we have illustration on this film. Peter thoroughly enjoys and responds primarily to three-dimensional sculpturing and maquetting. He can pick them up, he can turn them and look at them from the camera angles he can imagine in the film," says Taylor. "Every designer we have goes through a stringent training of sculpting ability to get up their sculpting skills, so they can present their ideas in three dimensions. We also take that right into the landscapes and maquettes we do in the environments. We have done more conceptual art on Kong than we did for all three Rings movies put together, to really explore the environment and the fauna and flora of the world."

While King Kong is being digitally created, the Weta team are building a stand-in of the giant gorilla's head. This is for Naomi Watts to play off against. "It replaces the orange tennis ball on a stick that we used so confidently in Lord of the Rings," says Taylor. "Because of the emotional state that Naomi needs to get into, we have determined that there is benefit in building a full sized Kong head purely as a stand-in." The first step in the process of making King Kong was to get everyone in the Weta workshop to watch the original movie. "We watched it with Peter and that

Miniatures are another massive undertaking. "For Lord of the Rings we did 72 miniatures in five and a half years and on this film we are doing 42 miniatures in just over a year," explains Taylor. "So we have to meet a schedule of a miniature every week and a half to meet the deadlines that are required of us."

Although he's working long hours and battling with deadlines, Richard Taylor is such an enthusiastic collaborator that at the end of the day at the Weta Workshop he doesn't go home to put his feet up. On the night when Jackson was filming the big scene when Naomi Watts was prepared for sacrifice, Taylor was out there on location. Much of the energies and inspiration of Taylor and his team are to create the world of Skull Island, which is Kong's home. But the 1930s New York where the mighty ape will be taken to be shown off as a captive is a job for the digital experts. "We've found almost no instance where we need to build New York as a miniature, because New York is a geometric world of very hard surfaces, reflective brick - a square nature. The digital effects department has confidently engineered the world of New York as an environment. In contrast, the very rugged and textural environments and architecture and the tangled web of vines and suchlike that is Skull Island, was near impossible to do digitally. So a great deal of our work, ultimately, will be in creating the vistas of Skull Island, the ancient culture which originally built the wall and the ancient city that lives within the wall, and all of the natural trees and plant growth that makes up



was special because he owns a few of the original props and he had them in his lap. And we were all intently watching and every time something exciting happened he would wave them," says Taylor. He says that when the original Kong was filmed, it was at the height of technology of the time. But apart from the scientific achievement, it was a phenomenal film. Taylor's introduction to the wonder of King Kong was through the passion of Peter Jackson. The special effects wizard and Tania first saw the movie in the two roomed bungalow where Jackson, then a struggling Kiwi filmmaker, had set up home. "We were equally captivated by it and knew it would become a mark throughout our careers. So now to be working on this with Peter is an inspiring thing."

TAYLOR SAYS THAT OF the different challenges that Kong has presented compared to The Lord of the Rings, the greatest has been time! "On Middle-earth we had seven and a half years in which to create the universe, but on Kong it is much more compressed. It is sort of an American filmmaking schedule, driven by a Christmas 2005 release, which focuses the speed for decisions that need to be made and the volume of work that has to be gotten through. It is easily as large a filmmaking task as any of The Lord of the Rings films as Peter has chosen to tackle it. The momentum we need to achieve that is significant." For King Kong, Weta have to create a huge amount of weapons, prosthetics and costuming for the natives.

the island." The team are building huge architectural structures, rock faces and beach fronts that are all part of the ancient civilisation that existed on Skull Island. But a huge part of the work has been the creation of a jungle that's created with hundreds and hundreds of miniature trees and miniature organic items.

TO CREATE THIS JUNGLE, again as we were not surprised to discover, no detail was ignored or dismissed as the special effects team strived for absolute perfection. These experts have visited a mountain range north of Wellington that is called the Aronga-Arongas. The first wind that hits it comes off the South Pole, so everything that grows on it is dwarfed. "We have a group of people that go there everyday and cultivate the trees that have been dwarfed by the wind. We also cultivate the little tiny ferns that grown on the Aronga-Arongas and those we bring back to a huge greenhouse we've set up. We transfer them into zero nutrient soil and then they are very carefully tended. We have tended 20,000 ferns to date," says Taylor as he touches one of these little trees. When the miniature stage needs them, they are contained in a greenhouse. On top of these dwarf trees, the team have been building about 280 articulated trees. "That's because Peter wants the wind blowing across the island, so we've had to physically articulate every miniature tree we've built. That's no small undertaking - every branch and leaf spray has articulated sections put into them." **NAG**



VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

PC

■ Developer

Big Huge Games

■ Publisher

Microsoft

■ Supplier

Comztek [0860] 600 557

■ Genre

RTS

■ Release Date

2006



RISE OF NATIONS: RISE OF LEGENDS

STRATEGY CAN BE a stoic's game. RTS titles are usually specific and loyal to their locations. But every now and then someone tries to change the mould a bit. Naughty Dog made the interesting, if fatal, decision to make the Total Annihilation sequel a fantasy one. When Westwood became part of EA, the team eventually ended up creating the Lord of the Rings games. Now Big Huge Games, creator of the acclaimed, if flawed, Rise of Nations game and expansion, has also broken with the historical tradition of the game and gone into fantasy. But not just any fantasy.

According to Big Huge Games' Tim Train, a need for change was what prompted one. "Part of our excitement came from getting free from some of the constraints of reality and giving our imagination free reign. Having done a lot of history titles, we were also psyched to move on to something



different," he said. Different the game certainly is. Microsoft first released Rise of Legends at Gencon 2005 purely to gauge perceptions of the game. Big Huge Games was taking a risk, breaking with the series' historical tradition and then still not conforming to any current fantasy or sci-fi conventions. Instead, Rise of Legends is a mixture of the two, but with heavy influences from themes like Arabian Nights and the Renaissance artists - specifically Leonardo da Vinci.

Needless to say, the reaction was beyond favourable, otherwise you wouldn't be reading about it. Most critics felt Rise of Nations fell short in the graphical and engine department. Rise of Legends clearly has a score to settle here, since a more visually stunning RTS isn't around at the moment. The game still works off the basic Rise of Nations principles, with borders and city construction. But the setting and story allowed Big Huge Games to get really creative, using a powerful engine to do so.

In Rise of Legends two magic and two technology races fight amongst each other. In the land of Aio, the magical nation of Alim has ruled the roost from their Arabian-themed floating cities. But the citizens have become a bit complacent. Meanwhile the Vinci, based heavily on Da Vinci's designs and ideas, developed technology in the style of 15th century advancements (gear and pulley) and created



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massive, steam-powered machines to help them fight. After the Vinci leader is assassinated, a civil war breaks out. The Alim get involved, seeing this as an opportunity to destroy the technology itself. Two more races haven't been announced yet and it will be interesting to see what they look like, because the current two are

pretty striking.

The Alim, as mentioned, are based in magic and have an Arabian style to their buildings and technology. Arabian Nights is the prevailing theme here: Alim artillery are Djinn's casting various spells, sand and crystal golems provide heavy support and the Glass Dragon, a flying unit that refracts sunlight into powerful blasts, is the heavy hitter in the bunch. The Vinci hit back with technology units such as gear-powered tanks, mechanical soldiers and a huge spider unit called the Land Leviathan. Both sides look distinctly different, with the Vinci architecture and design looking very 15th century Italian.

Physics coming from the Novadex engine is definitely one of the game's selling points. Attacks look devastating as explosions blast soldiers away, huge units lumber around shaking the ground, and rocks roll down from mountains as the battle takes place. Graphically, as you can see, the game isn't looking too shabby either. It comes with the full package of lighting, texturing and particle effects, so the question is rather if your system can run it. But we'll also have to wait and see if the final game actually looks like this when it's released.

The Rise of Nations faithful had good reason to stick to their game. Rise of Legends might be forgoing the historical nature of the series, but it takes it into a new and interesting world, with a visual style and look that definitely backs it up beautifully. **NAG**



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VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

■ PC

■ Developer

Turbine

■ Publisher

Atari

■ Supplier

Megarom [011] 234 2680

■ Genre

RPG

■ Release Date

Q4 2005

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Exterminators
in Eberron don't
have easy jobs*



DUNGEONS & DRAGONS ONLINE: STORMREACH

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS ONLINE? Wait, this has been done before. Pretty much every Fantasy RPG out there uses the D&D rules in some guise. The ones that don't are actually few and far in-between. So what exactly does this famed (and infamous) series have to gain by heading into the lucrative, if cutthroat, MMOG market except nostalgia from the pen-and-paper players who've since not had the time to play? Not much, until you try the game itself.

One thing was clear from the outset of this game's development: if, as a MMOG, it simply used the D&D rules as they have been represented by other role-playing games, it would definitely fail. You need more to drag cash out of players month after month. So a few changes were made to the system, but at its core it's still Dungeons & Dragons.

What has remained is the need for players to understand their classes. Dungeon crawling is also a staple of the D&D diet, so the MMOG plans to focus on this heavily. In fact, players will be able to teleport to dungeons and missions directly. This seems to cut down on the immersion factor of the game, letting players feel isolated, but the intention is really to get to where the action is. It's in these situations that the changes and similarities really stand out.

The reason why understanding your class will be so important is that combat, unlike other MMOGs, isn't automated. Players will have to manually dodge and roll, countering attacks and creating their own. Since the game uses the D20 3.5 rule set, dice rolls and stats will impact on this, but don't expect your character to automatically implement

skills as you might need them. To further emphasise using your character's skills, killing monsters will not gather any experience points - only completing missions will award players in this way. This has allowed the developers to create far more open-ended dungeons. The teleportation means that players don't risk being interrupted by a brawling party while they play as a thief sneaking past a dragon. Traps and such are also designed to be mostly optional and scenarios can have multiple ways to get around them. For instance, a trap can clear a room of monsters or cause problems for the party or both, but it's an alternative to actually fighting everything in the room.

By the looks of it, D&D Online will have enough new ideas to hold its own. Using the new setting of Eberron gives more options for classes and characters as well, so it should appeal to more than just D&D fans. But will it be enough to take on this crowded market? We hope so... **NAG**



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VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

PS2

■ Developer

Clover Studios

■ Publisher

Capcom

■ Supplier

Ster Kinekor Games

[011] 445 7900

■ Genre

Action

■ Release Date

November 2005



*Are games art?
After Okami
there will be no
question of that*

OKAMI

WHEN IS A GAME art? 3D modellers have long considered low-poly model builders as artists in their own right. But can a game actually be a piece of art in itself? That argument might very well be settled, to a degree at least, with Okami. The game comes from Clover Studio, the same group responsible for the Viewtiful Joe titles. But this Eastern art-inspired adventure will change your mind on game presentation and what the aged PS2 can still achieve.

When someone steals a powerful sword, the demon Orochi rises and plunges the land into darkness, unleashing all kinds of monsters. The village of Kamiki is also impacted and this prompts its guardian, the goddess Amaterasu, to take the form of a wolf and stop the invasion of evil, along with her sprite sidekick Issun. Simple enough. But knowing what Okami is about hardly explains the game. It doesn't even begin to.

Clover Studio based the visual style and gameplay on Japanese water painting. The world looks like a piece of art and as Amaterasu travels the land, she leaves a trail of flowers and enhances the world's look. The wolf has a standard set of attacks, from effective head-thrusts to over-the-top body slams. But the real power lies in the Celestial Paint Brush. When Amaterasu went to sleep a hundred years ago, she forfeited some of her powers to 13 deities. Players will have to find these deities and learn

the new powers to beat Orochi. One of the first is when you complete a constellation in the sky using the brush. This calls forth Yomigami, a dragon that teaches players how to draw movement aids like bridges and vines. Now Amaterasu can access the drawing area of the brush and create a bridge where the game calls for it. It's not clear how flexible this will be in terms of when you can do it, but it's an interesting idea. The second guardian (whom you raise by painting in the broken blade of Nagi's sword) shows the world and sprite how to do special slash attacks with the paint brush. There are eleven more such powers to find over the long and elaborate world. Adventuring is a large part of Okami, so don't expect the usual hack-an-slash mechanics. Clover Studio has never seemed keen to rest on tradition and Okami promises to be elaborate and involving, prompting a lot of comparisons with the under-valued Windwaker.

To be frank, very little has been shown of the game, but there's a reason for that. Okami clearly is something special and is on our list right alongside the other PS2 notable this year, Shadow of the Colossus. **NAG**



PlayStation®2 

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Official PlayStation 2 Magazine

4 resident evil

evolution...



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new horror. new content. exclusive to PS2 this nov

VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

PC

■ Developer

Phenomic

■ Publisher

JoWooD

■ Supplier

WWE [011] 462 0150

■ Genre

RPG/RTS

■ Release Date

Q4 2005



It might not appeal to hardcore RPG or RTS players, but the game hopes to balance the two



SPELLFORCE 2



WHAT DO YOU THINK of combining the RPG and RTS genres into one? Sounds complicated? Well, it isn't exactly a walk in the park, but Phenomic pulled it off with Spellforce and both its expansions. Now the sequel is under development and it seems that instead of resting on its laurels – or running for the hills with something much easier to design, like we would have done – the developer is sticking to its guns and taking the RPG/RTS concept further. Fans will be delighted, especially since the only big thing wrong with the first game was how long it was.

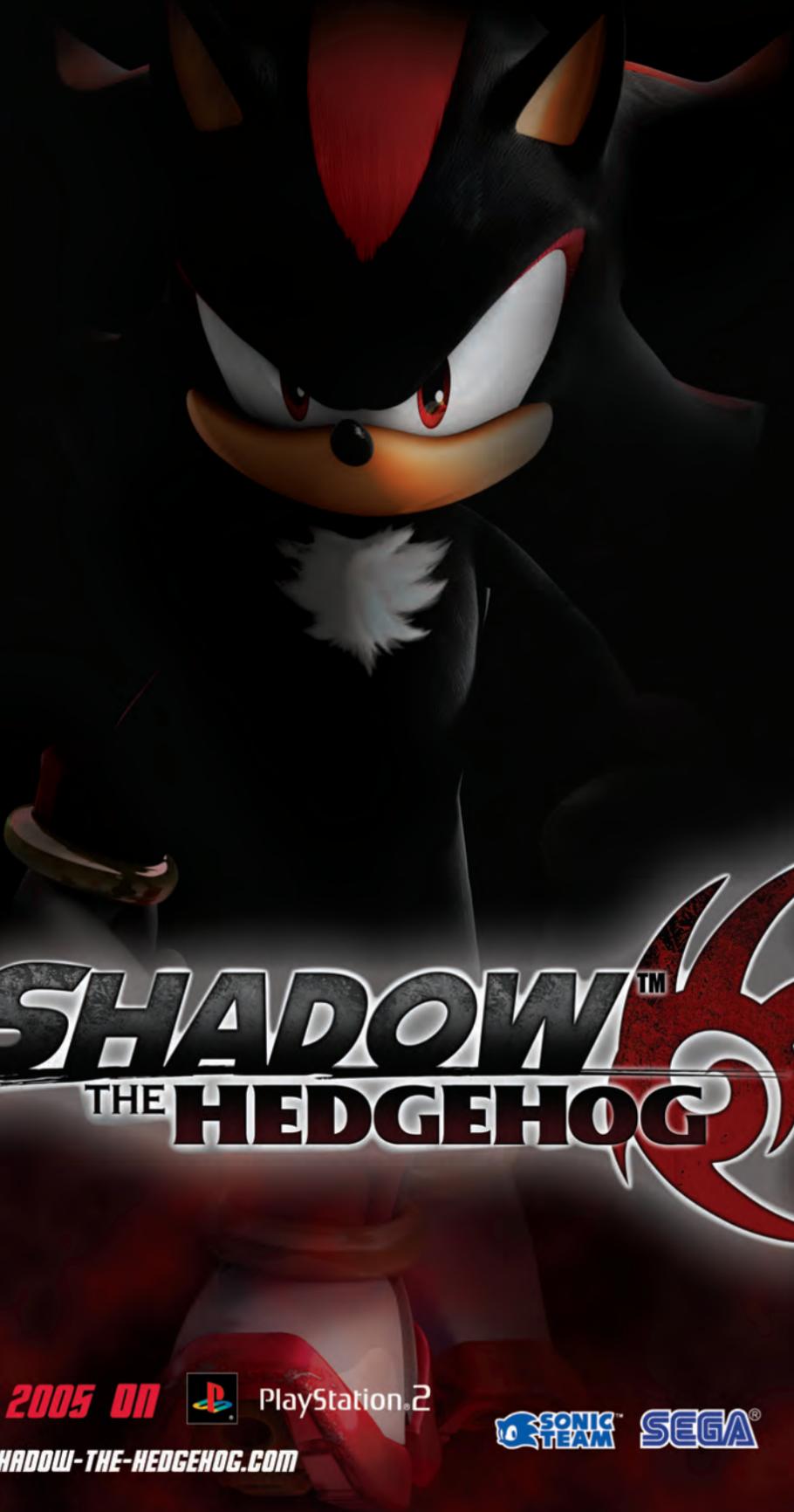
The major change between the games will be the interface. Phenomic has sought a way to make the two genres work together more seamlessly and the key element brought in more is the heroes in your party. During a battle, all the heroes will be represented by icons at the top of the screen, allowing players to immediately assign tasks or cast spells without having to locate the specific unit. The RPG element of equipment has been elaborated on as well, since players

can now gear up any of the heroes through a paper doll system. In fact, item collecting is a big part of the new game and taking part in battles is likely to be prompted by all the loot you can grab on the battlefield.

In the same sense, the RTS side has also been more polished with better AI and easier to manage armies. Taking side-quests while building up your army will be a lot easier, but most appealing is how easy it is now to switch from RTS' top-down view to a ground-level third-person one where your avatar can take part in the battle first-hand.

The concept isn't entirely new, but the Spellforce series has certainly set a benchmark. Apart from the spit-n-polish to the interface and engine, the game itself has had a large visual overhaul. The armies are still huge, but the detail is far more with a large and rich-looking world to explore. It's doubtful that the sequel will go out of its way to woo new fans, unless they like their games complicated and involving. But as far as the series goes, Spellforce 2 looks like a step up in every sense. **NAG**

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VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

PC PS2 XBOX

■ Developer

Midway

■ Publisher

Midway

■ Supplier

Ster Kinekor Games

[011] 445 7900

■ Genre

Action horror

■ Release Date

Q4 2005

Things get even
bloodier as
Torque and the
demons hit town



THE SUFFERING: TIES THAT BIND

THE SUFFERING WASN'T A revolutionary survival horror. In fact, smack-'em-up horror would be more apt. The game made a name for itself with heavy gore and some horrible monsters, not to mention an interesting morality feature that determined the storyline and which three of the endings you'd end up at. Taking its queue from here, *Ties that Bind* will use completed save games from the first game to determine which of the three beginnings you start with. Alternatively, you get the middle one.

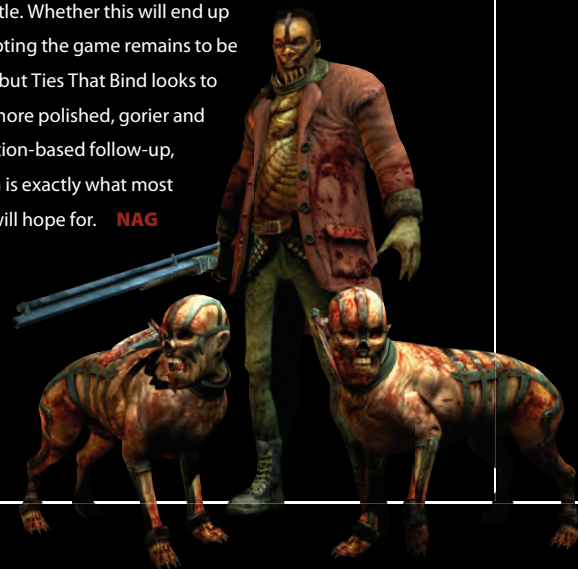
In the sequel, our convict turned demon hunter, Torque, returns to Baltimore, his home town. You might notice similarities here with *Resident Evil*, which moved from the confines of the mansion to the comparatively open spaces of Raccoon City. In Baltimore, Torque's old neighbourhood is a dump of a place, but things are about to get worse as the demons follow him. This time, though, the demons changed to reflect the environment. A knife monstrosity is symbolic of gang violence, a flaming monster with a liking for fire reflects arson, and a syringe-toting monster (who looks a lot like the Lethal Injection demon from the first game) is the Drug Scourge. The bosses also show this adeptness to their environment with themes like Abuse against Women, Fast Food addiction and The Projects as a whole.

Ties that Bind isn't going out to rewrite the first game, just improve on it. Controls are set to be much tighter and Torque has gained the abilities to jump and crouch. The wider spaces mean that more monsters will attack you, placing emphasis

on the action side of things. Some of the new monsters are creative, others are rehashed from the original game, but there are a lot of them and they are tough.

The biggest upgrade seems to lie with Torque himself as his demon alter-ego is stronger and tougher than the original incarnation. It will visually also reflect Torque's morality, from an evil-looking spiked demon to a not-so-evil looking glowing demon. It's really just a cosmetic touch – the morality doesn't appear to impact how much damage your alter-ego does.

Fans of the series will be delighted with more monster-saturated gore and violence throughout the game. The flashbacks are in this game as well, but some feel they are too frequent, even more so than in the first title. Whether this will end up disrupting the game remains to be seen, but *Ties That Bind* looks to be a more polished, gorier and an action-based follow-up, which is exactly what most fans will hope for. **NAG**



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PC CD-ROM

VITAL INFO

Platforms

PSP

Developer

Rockstar

Publisher

2K Games

Supplier

Ster Kinekor Games

[011] 445 7900

Genre

Freeform

Release Date

Q4 2005



GTA: LIBERTY CITY STORIES



**No-one in GTA
ever looks
friendly**

HOW WOULD YOU CHANGE the PSP into a killer console? You need a killer app, something Nintendo has now managed a few times on the DS. The PSP is lagging behind because all of its truly great franchises are still due on the handheld, while none of the new stuff really sparked gamer interest. But you can always rely on GTA and that's exactly why everyone is waiting for Liberty City Stories, the series' debut on the PSP.

Fans of Rockstar games already know not to expect a simple port. Liberty City Stories takes place around three years before GTA III and for the first time players assume the role of an already-familiar character, Toni Cipriani. Back in town after four years (he was hiding after killing a made man), Liberty City has changed a lot and the Cipriani family's power is being challenged. Toni is going to sort this out with the various gangs and criminal elements in the city (with over 70 to 80 missions, the equivalent to Vice City's selection).

It's a mixture of old and new. Both Rockstar North and Rockstar Leeds have been working on the title for about two years and hope to have it out by the end of October. Rumours persist that the current PSP battery can't handle streaming well, holding off games like Liberty City Stories, and Rockstar won't yet comment on loading times or battery life. The game is a mixture of staple GTA and some new elements. While

not as robust as San Andreas, expect your character to at least gain stamina and such. Outfits are also around the size of Vice City – more or less 10 – and the actual game area is smaller than SA's. For that reason no flying vehicles were included, but there are new ground- and water-based ones to try out.

Rockstar's biggest challenge was perhaps the interface. Without a second analogue stick, the game will handle slightly differently. It's still the same control scheme, but with more combinations. For instance, depressing one of the shoulder buttons changes the analogue from movement to adjusting the camera. Graphically, the game seems to surpass GTA III and Vice City, boasting San Andreas' model quality plus extra effects such as reflections. Reports are that the frame rate is stable and the drawing distance adequate.

To accommodate for mobile gameplay, there will be a lot of phone booth missions structured to be entirely optional and fairly quick. Rockstar sees it as something you can do between bus stops. Elements such as the soundtrack and radio stations are still being kept under wraps, but a few stations have already been confirmed. The big question is really if the PSP can handle what Liberty City Stories wants to dish out, but Rockstar hasn't disappointed us yet.

PSP-owning fans will get it and the rest will probably get PSPs just to get it. **NAG**

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216 AD

1206

1334

1468

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1930

1945



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DUNGEON TRAWLING

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78



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Editor's Choice

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Platform

Platforms are described using icons rather than just plain old words. For those of you who don't know (shame on you) they are, left to right, top to bottom: PC, PS2, GameCube, Xbox, PSP, Game Boy Advance, and DS.



Scoring

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75

VITAL INFO

Platforms

PC

Suggested Retail Price

R 299

Developer

Gas Powered Games

Publisher

Microsoft Game Studios

Supplier

Comtek [0860] 600 557

Genre

RPG

Age Restriction

12+

Minimum Specs

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DUNGEON SIEGE II

THE ORIGINAL DUNGEON SIEGE drew a fair bit of fanfare. Its shiny graphics, innovative skill system and 3D camera was like a breath of fresh air in a genre that'd stagnated since Diablo 2. That said, it still felt incomplete, with several areas feeling substandard - storyline chief among them. Enter Dungeon

Siege II, the long-awaited hack-'n-slash that everyone hoped would set the bar for mindless monster clubbing excellence.

In truth though, Dungeon Siege II simply doesn't cut it. There's no two ways about it. Considering the amount of time it's been in production, the commercial success of the original and the involvement of big names such as Chris Taylor in the development process, Dungeon Siege II is just not up to scratch.

Let's start with the most glaringly shortfall and our biggest problem with the original - the plot. Dungeon Siege II's storyline, like its predecessor's, is simply laughable. To be fair, it's not quite as bad as the first one, but it's still a poorly thought out mess that spends too much time making obscure references to the underdeveloped Dungeon Siege universe, and not enough time advancing the plot in a meaningful, engaging way. The cut scenes and flashbacks that attempt to tie threads of the plot together fail miserably. The cut scenes themselves are a bit of joke. They seem to come and go entirely at random, inserted by the developers at the most inappropriate times, and more often than not, cause the game to lock up for a second or two before they start - an



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entirely annoying process that detracts rather than adds to the gaming experience.

Visually, the game is dated and pales in comparison to MMORPGs such as Guild Wars or World of Warcraft. The reason for this is pretty obvious: it uses the now antique Siege engine, the same that powered the original Dungeon Siege and the expansion, Legends of Aranna. While the spell effects are pretty and the weapon sets and armour look decent, the polygon count simply isn't high enough to evoke gasps or little shrill exclamations of "Oh cool!"

The same is true for the music and sounds, which for the most part go unnoticed. The game simply feels incomplete in many respects - the seemingly arbitrary cut scenes, the uninspiring score, the weak storyline with its predictable ending, all these areas could have done with a lot more work to produce a more polished final product. The menu, for instance, is in a vomit-inducing 640 x 480 resolution, and for no particularly good reason. The game could do with a hefty dose of spit and polish.

So we pretty much hate Dungeon Siege II then, with its unfinished feel, intrusive cut scenes, weak plot, substandard graphics and lacklustre soundtrack, right? Well, no, not really. For all its shortcomings - and there are a lot of them - Dungeon Siege II has a certain roguish charm. Like smoking cigarettes or clubbing baby seals, you just can't stop, even if you know it's bad for you. Just one more level, just one more item to complete the set, and before you know it, you've played it solidly for a week and have a party of level 93 characters (true story).

The truth is that Dungeon Siege II is arguably the most addictive hack-'an-slash RPG since Diablo 2. It manages to strike a perfect balance between mindless, repetitive monster slaying and character advancement. The item system makes use of regular, enchanting, unique, rare and set items, and with a pack horse and a town stash you can item hoard to your little treasure-grabbing heart's content.

The character development has been modified as well. The original Dungeon Siege introduced a unique system where your character developed skills and attributes based on the weapons they used rather than a set skill tree. For instance, using a sword and shield would increase your strength and melee skill, while equipping a fire bolt spell would have an effect on your intelligence and your combat magic proficiency.



Dungeon Siege II makes use of the same system, but the developers have introduced an intuitive skill tree that complements the gameplay well. As you gain levels in your particular skill, be it melee, ranged or one of the two schools of magic, you can put skill points into abilities that buff your character and give him access to special attacks. For example, a level 24 combat mage has access to Quicken Casting, and every point invested into this particular skill reduces the cool down between spells.

Another neat addition is the system of Powers. Powers are super skills unlocked by progressing through your character's skill tree. They're exceptionally powerful combat abilities, typically focused either on dealing massive damage to a single target, decimating hordes of enemies or buffing your party members for short periods. At the lower levels, Powers are typically fairly unimpressive, but as you dedicate more points to your skill tree, the Powers increase in potency as well, and by the time you max out a particular Power the monsters know all about it.

The addition of powers and the skill tree make Dungeon Siege II a marked improvement over the original in terms of gameplay, but in truth, little else. Considering how long we've waited for the title, it simply doesn't make the grade. It's great fun in co-op mode though, where you tend to skip the cut scenes and storyline anyway, but it'd be fallacious to say that Dungeon Siege II has any real substance. If mindless hack-'an-slash is your thing, you'll probably love it. **NAG**

CHOOSE WISELY

Party selection is crucial if you intend to clock the game on the hardest difficulty setting. Getting the right balance between heroes that can tank and take damage and those who are there primarily to dish it out is key. A good party setup always includes at least one tank to soak up enemy fire, typically a melee character or a pet such as the Mythrillhorn, and backed up by one or two combat mages and a dedicated healer to keep everyone buffed and healthy. Pack Mules are great for loot hoarding as well, but tend to get abused in a big fight.



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A bit lacking for single play, but it rocks in every other count

85

VITAL INFO

Platforms

PC

Suggested Retail Price

R 199

Developer

Team 17

Publisher

Codemasters

Supplier

Ster Kinekor Games

[011] 445 7900

Genre

Turn-based strategy

Age Restriction

3+

Minimum Specs

Pentium 3 1GHz

256MB RAM

DVD-ROM

2.36GB HDD

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insanity, plus
some awesome
animations*



WORMS 4 MAYHEM

IT'S WORMS TIME! THE cutest psychotic creatures in the game world are back. Combining the cutesy, but violent nature, of Lemmings with the turn-based combat of Scorched Earth has served the series well, and Team 17 did enough in terms of humour, features and ridiculous weaponry to make it a classic in its own right. What other game has embraced such an immortal WMD as Monty Python's Holy Hand Grenade?

But Worms hasn't always had it good. The later sprite-style games ran a bit stale in terms of ideas (except for Worms World Party), and the first 3D incarnation alienated fans more than garner new ones, leading to some declaring it the end of Worms.

NAG thought it a bit premature and we dug the 3D change, even though the game was besieged with bugs. Still, you have to keep the faith at least for a while and keeping faith with Worms paid off - gentlemen and ladies, this is Worms 4.

Okay, let's not get too excited or too ahead of ourselves. Worms 4 isn't exactly ground-breaking. But it is Worms 3, polished to a splendour and without the complications wrought by Worms Forts. The biggest change between the two games is that Team 17 sorted out how to bring 3D to the Worms universe, something that only took two games to achieve. Animations are a lot more polished and on top of that, significantly expanded. Just like the original



games, part of the fun was watching how the worms react to an attack. Worms 4 is the most empathic: worms have a lot of facial expressions and will do all kinds of things. Enemy worms will jeer your worms and if you get close to them, they raise their fists, challenging you to a fight. But point your target cross-hairs at them, and see them cover their faces or point to another worm as a better target. The worms grin, smile, frown, scream and do a whole range of very nicely-animated expressions. They shuffle along eloquently and animations around the game, especially explosions, are beautiful. The levels are colourful and thanks to the more customisable feel of the game, Worms teams and sound bites are extensive.

But a pretty game doesn't necessarily make a good game. You can't really fault Worms 4 for what it does. The story mode is pretty entertaining and much more fun than Worms 3. It's more challenging and funny as well. As mentioned, the game has a higher level of custom settings. Apart from the staple Make a Team and Make a Level sections, you can also Make a Weapon, in which tweaking settings will create a custom high-powered weapon for your team. A shop allows you to spend gold won on new weapons parts, levels, hats, faces, hands, sound bites and so on. Gameplay wise, it's pretty satisfactory as a package, but it also comes up lacking because there isn't a lot to keep you going in terms of traditional Worms. A single-player section that allowed you to play your team on various ladder competitions against the CPU would have been great, since missions tend to be restrictive in scope and weaponry.

Deathmatch is still a hoot and it seems a lot of the network lag problems have been solved. The game also doesn't require a monster of a machine, but it's not exactly a cutting-edge graphical game in the first place.

Worms fans should definitely give it a go, as should anyone who wants a turn-based party game. It's definitely the best 3D game in the series and, depending on your mood, one of the best overall. **NAG**



The most ground-breaking game we have seen in a very long time

75

VITAL INFO

Platforms

PC

Suggested Retail Price

R 299

Developer

Lionhead Studios

Publisher

Microsoft Game Studios

Supplier

Comztek [0860] 600 557

Genre

RPG adventure

Age Restriction

16+

Minimum Specs

Pentium 3 800MHz

256MB RAM

4x CD-ROM

NVIDIA GeForce 2™ Video Card

3GB HDD

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FABLE: THE LOST CHAPTERS



LIONHEAD STUDIOS NEEDS NO introduction. The software house, headed by ace developer Peter Molyneux, has established itself with hits such as *Black & White*. This new title from the company ventures into territory held by the likes of *Diablo*, and shatters previous benchmarks. *Fable* was originally released on Xbox, but this version has now been introduced to the PC, and features some new content.

Fable is one fairly lengthy and quite involved story, which can be a fairytale or a nightmarish saga, depending on the player. The story starts during the protagonist's childhood, and already the player is given the opportunity to make moral choices that will influence the character later on. Unlike many story-orientated role-playing games which tie the player into a particular path, *Fable* features a moral alignment system that allows players to rise to sainthood, sink to the diabolic, or sit on the fence somewhere in-between. Needless to say, this means that a variety of plot options must be made available, and this the game does - and rather elegantly. Key goals and events remain largely fixed, but a player's responses to these allow a number of details to alter accordingly. For example, at the end of gladiatorial games, if afforded the opportunity to kill the opposing duellist for extra gold, what do you do? Depending on your actions, non-player characters will adjust their predisposition toward you in an appropriate fashion. Perhaps the opposing duellist has a sibling. If

so, expect a vendetta! Word of a character's actions gets around, and NPCs will either lionise the protagonist, shun him, or treat him in a neutral fashion.

The non-player character system bears special mention. These computer-controlled entities populate the world of *Fable*, going about their daily activities. As the sun rises, various citizens will gradually emerge from their homes and proceed to their workplaces, such as shops. This creates quite an amusing situation when the player tampers with the daily cycle, making the sun rise in the middle of the night - all of a sudden doors burst open and bewildered shopkeepers hurry to their posts! But the NPCs also interact with the player character's reputation and witnessed actions. As a player gains renown by undertaking heroic deeds (which can be good or evil, incidentally), citizens develop opinions. Members of the opposite sex (and, occasionally, of the same sex) tend to become attracted to the famous, while the notorious villain will command fear from the commoners, who will often flinch and cower in such a character's presence. To facilitate social interaction, players are given access to a variety of expressions they can use, including insults, expressions of gratitude, intimidating moves and flirtatious poses, to name but a few. Players can also offer gifts, which is a useful approach in courtship. Yes, romance plays a part, and there are advantages

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to marrying (monogamy is not enforced, except that due to certain nuptial requirements, only one spouse may be had in any given town). One's choice of apparel also affects how others perceive the character, and different outfits influence attractiveness, scariness and alignment perception. Tattoos and hairstyles also influence these factors. All-in-all, a character can be quite thoroughly customised.

Property in Fable is not restricted to what you can carry. Real-estate is a valuable commodity, and players can buy houses (no one will marry you if you can't provide a place to live) and even shops (including a brothel). Houses can be upgraded and then lived in, resold or rented out.

All right, enough about the social simulation aspects. What about the adventuring side of things? Characters are members of the Heroes' Guild, which trains prospective heroes and then provides them with employment, in the form of officially sanctioned quests. Some of the quests are optional, and these are useful to further define your character's personality. Others are story quests, and must eventually be completed in order to complete the game. But don't take too long – time waits for no man, and your character does age as game time passes!

The action revolves around melee combat, ranged combat and the use of will – magic. The control interface is fairly accessible and once one gets used to it, some pretty amazing things are possible. As with any role-playing title, there is the concept of earning experience in order to advance your character. The experience system is rather elegant. Four types of experience are earned: one for each of the spheres of combat (melee, range and will) and generic experience. The specific experience points are earned by applying the appropriate skills and can only be spent on advancing the appropriate disciplines. Generic experience can be spent in any fashion, and allows players to steer their characters' development slightly in spite of how obstacles were overcome. Each skill has several ranks, and the costs for subsequent ranks grow exponentially – which is a pity, as it means that inevitably it becomes more worthwhile to spend a few hundred generic experience points on something that hasn't been used, rather than save up tens of thousands for one's chosen focus. This means that, ultimately, all characters end up



quite well rounded and, essentially, rather similar with only the specialisations varying. Oh well, nothing's perfect!

Let's wrap up with the nitty-gritty. The story-line is simply awesome, rich with twists and turns, and with (as mentioned before) opportunities to alter the course of events (slightly). It will also keep you busy for anywhere from 30 to 60 hours – and then you get to try a protagonist with a different philosophy! Furthermore, the ambience is at times quite humorous, and a cornucopia of possible actions abound ("Would you like to sponsor the guards' break for 1,000 gold?" means: "Would you like to slip the guards a grand so they are somewhere else while you carry on with some questionable activities"). The graphics are amazing, as can be witnessed while strolling through the woods (when last did a fantasy action hero stroll?). Each leaf casts its own shadow on the forest floor, and the shifting patterns of light and shadow are quite something to behold – and that's before you consider the sunbeams that are sometimes visible when the weather is just right. The aural experience includes the usual sound effects and environmental background, but also snatches of overheard conversation as one passes townsfolk. The game dynamic is fluid and complex and an absolute delight. Sadly, this title offers no multi-player, which is understandable from a complexity point of view. But we can only hope that a future evolution of this game will include this feature. **NAG**



Below: Why does being a hero always mean I have to be enemies with a dragon?



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An entertaining, action-fuelled cricket title

76

VITAL INFO

■ Platforms



■ Suggested Retail Price

R 299

■ Developer

Swordfish Studios

■ Publisher

Codemasters

■ Supplier

Ster Kinekor Games

[011] 445 7900

■ Genre

Sport

■ Age Restriction

3+

■ Minimum Specs

Pentium 3 800MHz

256MB

8x CD-ROM

NVIDIA GeForce 2™ Video Card

4.4GB HDD

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Cricket games have all become highly playable, but graphically they still lag behind

BRIAN LARA INTERNATIONAL CRICKET 2005

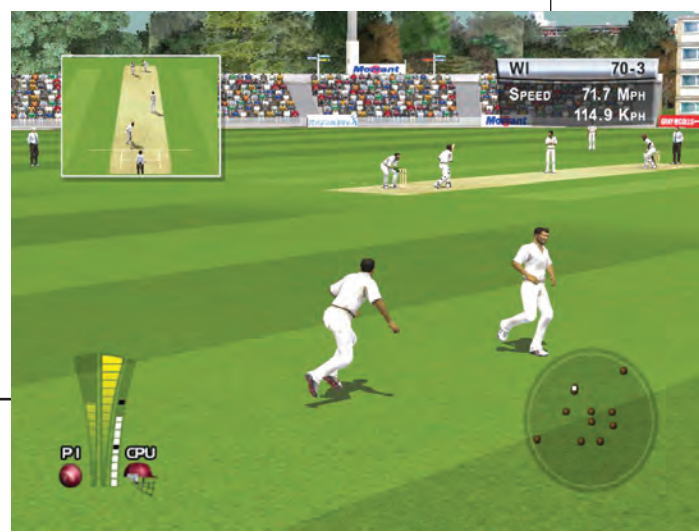
'BRIAN LARA INTERNATIONAL CRICKET' titles, much like the great man himself, have an aura of the dramatic. Both drop out of the spotlight for large periods of time (it's been six long years since Lara '99 made its mark). Yet, when both emerge from their surrounding mediocrity, they exude a swashbuckling mix of extravagance, excitement and enjoyment.

Codemasters must be applauded for keeping the full-on, all-action style with its latest offering that made Lara '99 so popular. Cricket is a game that does not, as yet, manage the crossover to hardcore simulation particularly well, painfully exhibited in this year's EA offering. Lara '05's unabashed arcade nature is a refreshing deviation from the all too stagnant quagmire of dull cricket titles. It offers a system that allows the player a chance to wallop balls to all four corners of the ground, makes bowling a slightly tougher affair and fielding practically a non-event. It's a scheme that could easily spell trouble for the game, but it works due to the title's well-balanced nature. Victory is always temptingly in sight for the player, yet never a certainty and, especially in the bowling department, players are forced to outwit the AI's varying tactics.

The game is made all the more entertaining by its numerous modes, the best feature being the inclusion of classic matches. It is a feature that allows the player to take part in a number of famous matches, ranging from the first Ashes game in 1882 to the 2003 World Cup, challenging the player to emulate history or rewrite it. Although the number of scenarios could

have been beefed-up from its current number of nine, it is a welcome diversion to the norm. Lara '05 also produces an expansive take on its career mode. Whereas so many other sport titles produce bog-standard affairs, Lara '05 requires the constant development of the player's skill and averages through tours and competitions. It is a tough test and suitably rewards the player with biographies of cricketing legends and photos of memorable moments that will no doubt please the cricket connoisseur. What will certainly not please players is the lack of player licenses in non-ICC events which lets the title down somewhat. It's an aberration that must be rectified in the future.

Still, the refreshing game-mode additions to an already addictive title make 'Brian Lara International Cricket 2005' the must-have cricket game of the year. **NAG**





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NAUGHTY DOG

Entertaining and compelling action title. Don't let the average graphics put you off

78

VITAL INFO

Platforms

PS2

Suggested Retail Price

R 499

Developer

Swordfish Studios

Publisher

Vivendi

Supplier

Midigital [011] 723 1967

Genre

FPS

Age Restriction

18+

Specifications

1-2 Players

2,079KB memory

Analogue: Sticks only;

Vibration compatible

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COLD WINTER

COLD WINTER, IN THE same vein as many other first-person shooters, has you blasting your way through a number of missions, with the ultimate goal of saving the world from certain destruction at the hands of a nuclear weapon wielding madman. In this instance, the protagonist is Andrew Sterling, a former MI-6 agent, who starts off the game by being rescued from a rather inhospitable Chinese prison. And whilst he may not be quite as suave as a certain other well-known MI-6 agent, he is an endearing enough character. After his rescue, he finds himself freelancing for a 'private security' company, which is presumably not an altogether too uncommon career choice for disavowed government agents.

From here, Sterling soon finds himself on the trail of the aforementioned madman, and so his quest to save the world begins. It's certainly nothing unique as far as storylines go, but it's told in an engaging way, and it manages to be quite compelling. Of course, this sort of game is all about the action, and in this regard Cold Winter does not disappoint. The game dynamic is typical of the genre, with a few interesting modifications, including among them the ability to manipulate the environment. For example, boxes can be thrown to distract enemies, and tables can be flipped on their sides to provide cover. You'll also be able to pick up raw materials along the way, such as cans of fuel and strips of cloth (which the character can combine in a MacGyver-like way to fashion Molotov Cocktails) and other rudimentary devices (not all of which are explosive in nature). Solid enemy AI adds to the experience and this makes for an overall enjoyable and challenging (on a high enough difficulty level) experience. Unfortunately however, the compelling play dynamic is let down to an extent by the often bland graphics, which do very little to push the console to its limits. The soundtrack and voice-acting are both of a very high standard, but this is once again offset by decidedly average sound effects. It's a shame that the presentation isn't of as good a quality as the rest of the game, because Cold Winter is undoubtedly one of the better and more enjoyable titles in its genre – in this case, it's definitely worth looking past the game's audio-visual shortcomings, underneath which lies quite a superb action title. **NAG**



A bad game, no matter how much you love RE

30

New Gaming

VITAL INFO

Platforms

PS2

Suggested Retail Price

R 349

Developer

Capcom

Publisher

Capcom

Supplier

Ster Kinekor Games

[011] 445 7900

Genre

Survival Horror

Age Restriction

16+

Specifications

1-4 Players

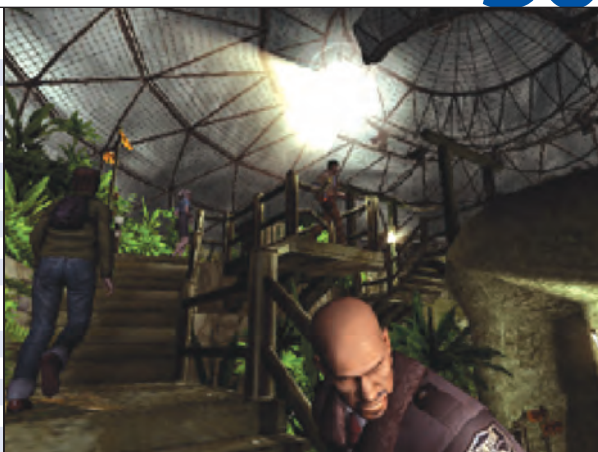
100KB memory

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Zombie

elephants cool,
or retarded,
we're not quite
sure



RESIDENT EVIL OUTBREAK FILE #2

FANS OF THE SERIES were delighted when Resident Evil Outbreak: File #1 came out. It gave them the chance to play Resident Evil cooperatively with friends, online. One could even play as a zombie, leaping out of closets and lockers to scare the hapless human friends. Naturally, it never became popular in South Africa due to a lack of broadband adapters and lacklustre local broadband. Unfortunately, Outbreak File #1 didn't really make the cut as an offline game, as its single-player wasn't interesting enough.

With much dismay, File #2 is even less of a single-player experience and the online component has actually suffered feature loss. Gone is the ability to play as a zombie. Instead you're stuck playing one of the eight characters in an attempt to once again survive the trite Raccoon City.

Four players can still team up and attempt the missions in the online network mode, but the lack of proper voice-communications makes it difficult to coordinate. The single-player offline mode gives you two AI partners who seem utterly incapable of doing anything other than run around like headless chickens straight into zombies, and then complain about it to the player. If you love hearing the words "help me!", then File #2 should appeal to you.

File #2 has nothing new. It might have been a decent enough game back in 2002, but it simply fails to stand up to modern conventions both in gameplay and graphics. **NAG**



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E&UE

Fairly decent, mildly entertaining, often inane volleyball title – neither terrible nor excellent

67

VITAL INFO

Platforms

PS2

Suggested Retail Price

R 279

Developer

Hypnotix

Publisher

Take 2

Supplier

Ster Kinekor Games

[011] 445 7900

Genre

Sport

Age Restriction

16+

Specifications

1-2 Players

83KB memory

Analogue: Sticks only

Vibration compatible



Volley balls and breasts, prison almost seems nice...

OUTLAW VOLLEYBALL REMIXED

WHILST OUTLAW VOLLEYBALL REMIXED can hardly be considered a sports simulation, it is in fact quite a decent 2-on-2 arcade-style volleyball title, though this detail is quite easily lost beneath the game's rather crass presentation of the sport. In a manner reminiscent of the Dead or Alive volleyball franchise, Outlaw Volleyball Remixed, a slightly-updated port of a 2-year-old Xbox title, squarely places its emphasis on scantily-clad representations of the female form, to the extent that one is almost left feeling that the actual volleyball element of the game was tacked on as an afterthought. As far as the play dynamic is concerned, Outlaw Volleyball Remixed actually manages to do a fairly decent job. After a few minutes of acclimatisation, you'll be able to perform spikes, blocks,

and the variety of other moves available with relative ease.

An interesting twist is the momentum meter which, as it fills up, allows you to perform more powerful moves. During the course of a match, you will also be able to challenge one of your opponents to very rudimentary one-on-one 2D combat – should you win, you are rewarded with a boost to your meter. The game offers four starting characters with quite limited abilities, but a number of additional stronger characters can be unlocked through the game's 'Tour' mode. A 'Drill' mode is also available, which allows you to boost any character's statistics through a series of fairly entertaining mini-games. Ultimately quite an average game, with the potential to provide, at best, a moderate degree of juvenile fun. **NAG**



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A promising concept ruined – disappointing

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VITAL INFO

Platforms



Suggested Retail Price

R 499

Developer

Eurocom Entertainment

Publisher

Vivendi

Supplier

Midigital [011] 723 1967

Genre

Action

Age Restriction

18+

Specifications

1 Player

80KB memory

Analogue: All buttons

Vibration compatible

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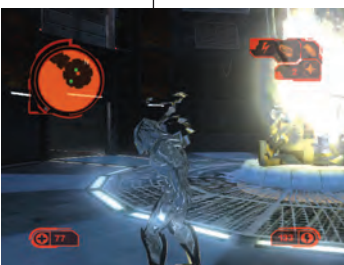
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*It's time for
some mediocre
hunting...*



PREDATOR: CONCRETE JUNGLE

THE IDEA OF CONTROLLING the Predator, everyone's favourite planet-hopping alien-hunter, is certainly an appealing one. And surprisingly enough, it's a concept that hasn't been executed before on the PS2. Unfortunately, the manner in which it has been executed in Predator: Concrete Jungle almost makes one wish it will never be attempted again. The game follows the story of a member of the Predator race sent to Earth in the 1930s. A series of rather unfortunate occurrences ensues, the end result of which is that this particular Predator is injured whilst trying to return to his spacecraft. In the subsequent chaos, he is forced to initiate the ship's self-destruct sequence and the resulting nuclear explosion is anything but inconspicuous. Fast forward 100 years, and his countrymen decide to give him a chance to redeem himself. He is sent on a mission to Earth to locate the remnants of his spacecraft and eliminate the hoodlums who are currently putting said technology to use for various nefarious purposes. The concept is solid, and so is the array of moves available to the Predator – a full arsenal of technologically advanced weaponry, different view modes and a number of combat techniques, involving various forms of dismembering his foes. In fact, this is where the game's biggest downfall lies. The controls are too cumbersome and make the game a chore to play. And many of the different abilities available are just too useless to actually make you feel like a Predator. Add to this a highly antagonistic camera, and suddenly traversing the city, whilst reigning bloody death upon those who oppose you, starts to feel slightly less exciting than emptying your cat's litter box. Redeeming factors are present, mostly in terms of the voice-acting, soundtrack and the phenomenal visual representation of the lead character. Unfortunately, though, all the other characters as well as the environment are decidedly bland, and to make matters worse, the story-telling soon disintegrates into something very closely resembling cheap porridge – it's loose, watery and lacks substance. All-in-all, Predator: Concrete Jungle demands too much effort for too little reward. Controlling a character like the Predator could quite easily have been the pinnacle of videogaming coolness, but is instead only slightly more enjoyable than a rather hard kick in the head. **NAG**



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KONAMI

VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

DS

■ Suggested Retail Price

R 399

■ Developer

Nintendo

■ Publisher

Nintendo

■ Supplier

Nintendo [011] 256 7760

■ Genre

Simulator

■ Age Restriction

3+

■ Minimum Specs

1 Player



NINTENDOGS

NINTENDOGS IS NOT A pet-simulator, nor is it a conventional type of game. It also won't appeal to everyone out there, despite having a wide-spread appeal factor due to its subject matter. Let's face it, if you are a dog-person then there is no doubt the mention of Nintendogs has caused your ears to perk and imaginary tail to wag. If you're a cat person, or just generally don't like animals, then it is obvious Nintendogs wasn't made for you. This aspect is mentioned because it is plain as day from the moment you adopt your puppy, that Nintendogs was made for people who love dogs.

Every single aspect of your puppy (or puppies, so be it) is fine-tuned to twang that chord in your heart that compels you to scratch a dog behind the ears.

At first glance Nintendogs may look like a pet simulator similar to something like a Tamagotchi, but this isn't entirely true. Nintendogs essentially contains all the enjoyable aspects of owning a puppy, and none of the negative elements. Your puppy never ages, instead remaining an ever-young bundle of energy. You also aren't required to feed your puppy or give it water - a Nintendog can't die. Water and food may not be required, but the game does reward attentive care by giving Trainer Points. Trainer Points are essentially the only true form of progression through the 'game', as they unlock more items to purchase at the store as well as new breeds for you to adopt.

Nintendogs comes in three different flavours, each cartridge with a unique set of five starting breeds. You purchase whichever copy, based on which breed you wish to adopt first. All three versions contain all the breeds however; it's just a matter of time and petting to unlock them. You can adopt up to three puppies at once, though this can get overwhelming fast, so it's recommended to start with one.

Nintendogs is an incredibly tactile experience, engaging from the moment you teach your dog its name by repeating it into the DS' microphone until it gives an understanding bark. Teaching your dog anything is usually a combination of stroking the stylus in the right spot and repeating a word until the dog associates the word with the action. For example, tapping your puppy on the nose causes it to sneeze. A little light bulb will appear at the top right of the screen, and tapping it will allow you to say a word (or phrase) into the microphone. If your dog understands, it'll give a knowing bark. Repeat the process, and soon you can simply say the word to have your puppy sneeze. If your puppy is confused by the word (either because it sounds like another trick it already knows, or you aren't speaking clearly), it'll tilt its head in consternation.

Teaching your dog tricks is essentially only used for participation in the Obedience Trials. There are three types of



[illegible]

VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

PSP

■ Suggested Retail Price

R 399

■ Developer

SCEJ

■ Publisher

SCEE

■ Supplier

Ster Kinekor Games

[011] 445 7900

■ Genre

Sport

■ Age Restriction

3+

■ Minimum Specs

1 - 8 Players

100KB memory

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EVERYBODY'S GOLF

UNLIKE MOST GOLF GAMES which focus heavily on which golf club to use, depending on the task at hand, Everybody's Golf takes a different route. You rarely have to change clubs manually; the game selects the best one for you at the beginning of each stroke. Instead, the player needs to pay attention to the terrain, how the ball will roll when it lands and so forth.

Most golf games put a lot of emphasis on the technical side of a stroke; using intricate systems for hitting the ball that often involve convoluted mouse or gamepad movements. Everybody's Golf avoids such systems but doesn't lose anything in the process.

The system for whacking the ball down the fairway is wonderfully simple - a two-button press approach. Once you start, the gauge begins to fill. The first press sets the strength of the shot and the second the accuracy, based on timing. Keeping the shot mechanics simple helps keep the game friendly. For the more adventurous out there who

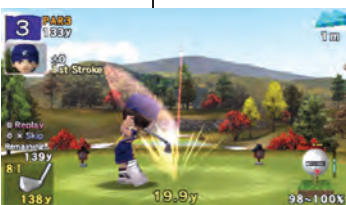
like to take more precision shots, you can use the D-pad to adjust the slice and spin of a ball by holding a direction on the second button press. There are also special moves you can learn such as homing shots, which help keep

things interesting and slightly more fun than stoic golf.

Friendly would be the best way to describe almost every aspect of Everybody's Golf, from its cute graphics to the wonderfully simplistic fairways and flora. The characters are colourful, their faces friendly and their appearances, abilities and attributes customisable. Progression rewards the player with more hats, shades, shoes and shirts with which to adorn their character, along with other interesting paraphernalia. The more you play with a character, the higher their loyalty meter raises which in turn unlocks various new skills. Progression through the game also rewards the player with items that improve character statistics if equipped. Golf, with a few role-playing elements on the side, works wonderfully for Everybody's Golf.

For those who want something more leisurely out of their PSP, such as a simple pick-up-and-play game that even includes a polished wireless multiplayer segment, Everybody's Golf is the perfect choice, even if you've never been interested in golf. **NAG**

*Fun on the
fairway, golf for
everybody*



VITAL INFO

Platforms

PSP

Suggested Retail Price

R 399

Developer

SCEE

Publisher

SCEE

Supplier

Ster Kinekor Games

[011] 445 7900

Genre

Action

Age Restriction

10+

Specifications

1-6 Players

120KB memory

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FIRED UP

AS A SHOWCASE FOR the PSP and its abilities, Fired Up is a great technical demo. The cityscape it renders for you to drive around in is respectable, while the wireless game modes (deathmatch and such) are augmented by the game's ability to Game Share a demo of itself wirelessly to someone else so they can join in, in limited capacity.

As a game however, Fired Up just doesn't manage to stand on its own legs. The game mechanics are simple. You drive around in a 4x4 with mounted gun, shooting at other vehicles in the city and sometimes taking control of a turret situated somewhere in a building. The controls are tight and functional, and the 4x4 handling okay. Enemies' vehicles seem to suffer

from exaggerated physics syndrome. The simplest explosion sends them catapulting miles into the air. The real letdown in Fired Up is the monotone mission structure. Missions are either of the 'go here and blow this up' or 'race here and pick up X and take to Y location' variety. The lack of variety in missions and lacklustre plot bring the otherwise potentially enjoyable experience down.

Fired Up seems rushed and nothing more than a quick technical demonstration with a game latched on. Once it hits the bargain bin it might be a quick fix for your PSP gaming needs. But other than that, it's nothing exceptional or even interesting. **NAG**



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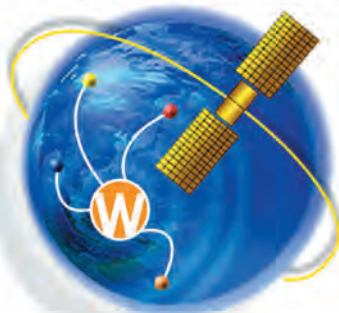
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More combat intensive and still fun

88

PRINCE OF PERSIA: WARRIOR WITHIN

THE PRINCE IS BACK and he's mobile once again. Fans already had Sands of Time on their phones, but Warrior Within goes further than that. In line with the console version, the game is more combat focused and the prince's abilities are far more athletic and aimed towards conflicts. Similar to Splinter Cell, this series is a 2D scroller, so older gamers will be left slightly nostalgic of the original rotoscoped game. Warrior Within spans over ten levels and will take a while to finish, since it's tough. But the combat system is nicely done and the game looks beautiful. Fans of good 2D action titles (like the Splinter Cell series) should give this a try.

VITAL INFO

Platforms

MOB

Suggested Retail Price

R 50

Developer

Gameloft

Publisher

Gameloft

Supplier

www.thumbtribe.co.za

[031] 202 4266

Genre

Action

Download Code

SMS: tribe 20338 to 40014

NB: make sure you leave a space after the word tribe.

Check www.thumbtribe.co.za for phone compatability and downloading instructions.



Not perfect, but very playable and well presented

80

TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2005

THE 2004 TIGER WOODS game didn't fare that well critically because it was bogged down with design and control issues. With 2005, EA clearly listened to the complaints and brought the game up to the standard we expect from its sports titles. Without needing to explain the game of golf, PGA Tour puts you in charge of the Tiger himself as you compete on the courses of the tour. The strokes are controlled by a power bar and some reviewers, as we did, found the controls a little unresponsive for this model. But it doesn't break the game and there is a lot of time to be spent fine-tuning shots and getting the best scores. Perhaps not as advanced as other versions of the game, it's a fun sports title for fans of golf games.

VITAL INFO

Platforms

MOB

Suggested Retail Price

R 50

Developer

EA

Publisher

iPlay

Supplier

www.thumbtribe.co.za

[031] 202 4266

Genre

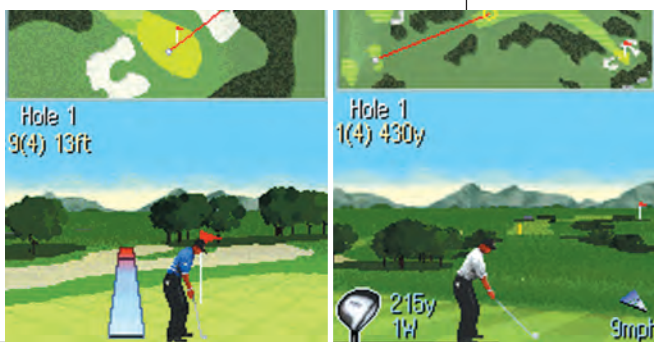
Sport

Download Code

SMS: tribe 10325 to 40014

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Check www.thumbtribe.co.za for phone compatability and downloading instructions.



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It's the mobile brawler done right

90

VITAL INFO

Platforms

MOB

Suggested Retail Price

R 50

Developer

Gameloft

Publisher

Gameloft

Supplier

www.thumbtribe.co.za

[031] 202 4266

Genre

Fighting

Download Code

SMS: tribe 20347 to 40014

NB: make sure you leave a space after the word **tribe**.

Check www.thumbtribe.co.za for phone compatibility and downloading instructions.

MEDIEVAL COMBAT: AGE OF GLORY

THE PROBLEM WITH BRAWLERS on mobile games is that the control schemes are simplified and they lack the depth their more advanced peers display. But Medieval Combat still manages a beefy and violent feel with a scheme that is more intuitive than easy. The game uses a selection of fantasy staples: knights, rogues, monsters, and so on. Each has a set of moves, and characters also vary in terms of speed. This, combined with the control scheme, makes the brawler easy to get into. It can also be replayed and has a lot of game types. So as a game that will sit on your phone for months, giving you entertainment every now and then, Medieval Combat fits in well. What it lacks in depth it makes up for with action.



The best mobile pool game around

85

VITAL INFO

Platforms

MOB

Suggested Retail Price

R 50

Developer

Gameloft

Publisher

Gameloft

Supplier

www.thumbtribe.co.za

[031] 202 4266

Genre

Sport

Download Code

SMS: tribe 20341 to 40014

NB: make sure you leave a space after the word **tribe**.

Check www.thumbtribe.co.za for phone compatibility and downloading instructions.

MIDNIGHT POOL

POOL GAMES HAVE ALWAYS been in the digital gaming arena - not surprising, considering pool's popularity as a parlour game. The mobile platform has been particularly prolific here, probably because it's a familiar game that anyone with a mobile phone would like to try. Sadly, these are generally also pretty shoddy as games. But Midnight Pool definitely takes the spot as the best pool game for mobile platforms. It features the signature manga style Gameloft games often have, and hosts a wide range of quirky characters to play against. Players gather cash by winning games. Hot streaks and trick shots get you more. All opponents are varied and interesting to play against, while the trick shots at the end of the round put a cherry on top. Stylish, fun and addictive.



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Do you own Sony's new handheld, the PlayStation Portable? If so, you're probably wondering what else you can do with your shiny new PSP, other than play games on it or watch UMD movies. If you don't own a PSP, you're probably wondering what the fuss is all about, or what good the PSP is other than for portable gaming or movie watching. Both of you, your salvation is at hand.

EVERYTHING

IN THIS FEATURE WE will examine the PSP and its multi-faceted nature, showing you just how far you can stretch the usefulness of your PSP. We're not going to cover the gaming or UMD movie aspects of the PSP, since that's pretty straightforward. Instead, we're going to show you how to copy movies from your PC to the PSP, what homebrew software is and where to find comics specially formatted for the PSP's screen. Your PSP can even browse the Web, and there are special Websites created specifically for this. So, switch on your PSP and watch as the functionality just explodes out of its diminutive package.

About Xploder for PSP

TO MAKE LIFE EASIER for PSP owners everywhere, Blaze has released Xploder for the PSP. Xploder is a must-have package for all PSP owners. It not only makes copying music and movies to the PSP a breeze, but it also comes bundled with a USB charging cable, letting you charge your PSP from a USB port on your computer instead of fumbling around with wall sockets and trying to find a two-prong plug port. The USB charging cable is also a USB data cable, letting you transfer files from your PC to your PSP easily. As there is no bundled USB cable with the PSP, if you have not yet bought one separately then the one that comes with Xploder for PSP is highly recommended.

In this article, we'll be using Xploder for PSP to do a lot of the music and movie related stuff, since it's simply the easiest way. There are other ways to copy music and movies to your PSP, most of which are explained online either on PSP fan sites such as [www.pspupdates.com] or by searching via Google.

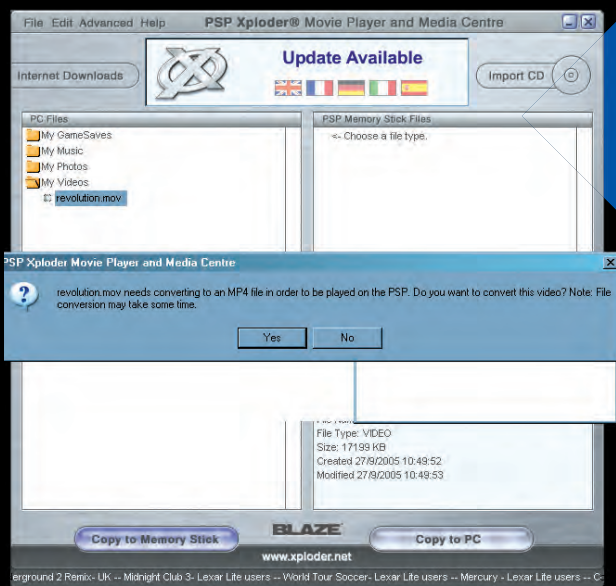
Xploder for PSP (which retails for around R399) is available from Bowline and most stores that stock the PSP.

Getting Movies on to your PSP

THERE IS NOTHING WORSE than being stuck in traffic, or in a queue at the bank with nothing to do. So to avoid having to stare at the car or fat lady in front of you, let's put some movies or TV episodes onto the PSP - portable viewing for the boring bits of your day.

Unfortunately, you cannot simply copy the movie or show of your choice to your PSP via the USB link, since the PSP can only play MP4





(MPEG-4) files. Fortunately, Xploder for PSP will convert your files for you automatically in the easiest way possible.

First, connect your PSP to your PC via the USB cable. Then select 'USB Connection' on the PSP under the 'Settings' menu. Now run Xploder for PSP.

Make sure you have the 'My Videos' folder selected in Xploder, then go to 'File' and then 'Add PC file'. Browse your computer until you see the movie or episode you want to put on your PSP, and then click 'Okay'. Clicking on 'Copy to Memory Stick' will start the conversion process to MP4 which may take some time, based on the size of the file.

Once the file has finished converting, it will be copied to the right place on the Memory Stick and then you can watch it by going to 'Video' on your PSP and selecting the file. No more boring queues for you!

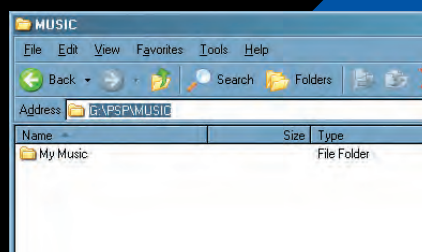
NOTE: The bundled Memory Stick Duo that comes with the PSP has only 32MB of space, so take that into consideration when copying music or movies to it. It is highly recommended that if you are going to be using your PSP as a portable media player, that you buy a larger Memory Stick Duo.

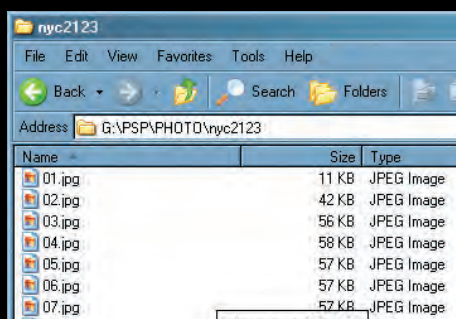
Copying Music on to your PSP

PUTTING MUSIC ON YOUR PSP is even easier than putting videos on it. You don't need to use Xploder for this, as the PSP can play MP3 files. Set your PSP to USB mode and a 'Removable Drive' will appear in Windows Explorer. You simply need to drag and drop MP3 files into the right folder for the PSP to find them. This folder is usually 'Drive Letter:\PSP\MUSIC'

Once you've placed your music files in there, you will find them under the 'Music' option on your PSP.

TIP: You can sort your MP3 files into folders on the PSP, but only one level deep. For example, under the \MUSIC\ folder you can make new folders such as \MUSIC\Rock\ or \MUSIC\Techno\. Any MP3 files put into those folders will show up in their own group in the music player of the PSP.





Homebrew software and games

HOMEBREW SOFTWARE IS SOFTWARE that has been written by users and aficionados of the PSP, and don't carry Sony's official support. Please note that Homebrew Software isn't technically what the PSP was made for, and as such it is your own responsibility when you use Homebrew Software on your PSP.

There are various difficulties with getting and running Homebrew Software. Getting the software is the easier of the two. Simply go to www.pspupdates.com to download new games and applications for your PSP. Unfortunately, Homebrew Software will only run on a PSP version 1.50. That means if you've recently updated your PSP to a newer version, Homebrew Software won't work on it. Users are still trying to get past this problem (Sony has put in various protective measures to prevent the software from running, in each update).

To see what version your PSP is, go to 'Settings', then 'System Settings', then 'System Information'. It will tell you your version on that screen.

If your PSP is version 1.50 or 1.51, you can run Homebrew Software. If it is any higher than that, such as 2.0, then you won't be able to (not yet, at least).

After you have downloaded the software you want from www.pspupdates.com, be sure to follow the included instructions that come with the files. It will tell you where you should put the files.

For the most part, Homebrew Software is very basic, the games nothing more than small examples of what can be done by an amateur programmer. Homebrew Software is a very technical aspect of the PSP and should only be attempted by users who understand things such as folders.

PSP-formatted content

THE PSP HAS A big, bright screen that is perfect for reading comics and other content on it. Unfortunately, the odd aspect ratio of the screen means that scanning in your X-Men comics and putting them on the PSP isn't going to be much fun, as you will have to scroll around the image a lot to be able to read.

Thankfully there are quite a few Websites out there that have started to release comics and such specifically formatted for your PSP. One such Website is nyc2123.com, which is a free graphic novel for your PSP that you can download and read on the go.

Once you have downloaded the ZIP file with the issue you want, unzip the JPG files to your computer and then connect your PSP via the USB cable. Images such as JPG files need to go into the \PSP\PHOTO\ folder and once again, you can create a sub-folder to keep things neat. So, for example, you could create a NYC2123 folder under PHOTO, and drag and drop the JPG files into that folder.

Once the files have copied, you can go to the 'Photo' section on your PSP and view the comic. The 'L' and 'R' shoulder buttons on your PSP go backwards and forwards through the comic.

If you enjoy reading Web comics and would like to read them on the go without being connected to the Internet, there is a great tutorial on 8bitjoystick [www.8bitjoystick.com/archives/jake_how_to_read_web_comics_on_a_playstation_portable.php] that will show you exactly how to make your favourite Web comics portable.



www.yourpsp.co.za

PSP has a locally supported Website with a comprehensive Help and Advice section. Features include step-by-step guides on how to configure and use various features of your PSP as well as a facility to register your PSP for support purposes and free downloads.



mobile games

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Check phone compatibility and WAP/GPRS settings before trying to load games.

Choose your game and follow the SMS instructions for that game.

When you request a game via SMS, a WAP Bookmark, Service or Push message will be sent to your phone.

You need to connect to this via WAP/GPRS to download the game onto your phone.

For Nokia handsets, if the message does not appear in your inbox, go to Services/Service inbox to retrieve the game.

For Samsung and Sony Ericsson handsets ensure Push Message settings are set to 'Receive All' or 'Always'.

WARNING: Data and Fax enabling your SIM card may take up to 24 hours to be activated, depending on your operator.

You can't download a game until your SIM card has been Data and Fax enabled and you have WAP/GPRS settings saved to your phone.

R20 games

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R50 games

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10 LG C3400 F2400 C1100

11 Nokia 3100 3200 3300 5100 6100 6220 6230 6610 6800 6820 7210 7250 7250i

12 Nokia 6600 6260 6670 6680 7610

13 Nokia 3230 6680 3650 7650 ngage

14 Nokia 3510i

15 Motorola C650 V180 V220

16 Motorola V300 V500 V600

17 Motorola V547 V550 V620 V975 V980

18 Motorola V3 V80 E398 E550 E1000

19 Sony Ericsson F500i K500 K700 S700i V800

20 Sony Ericsson T610 T630 Z600

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Blaze PSP accessories pack

Bowline will be offering value packs for the PSP by mid November, which include a standard Blaze PSP accessories pack and a Lexar Gaming Edition card.

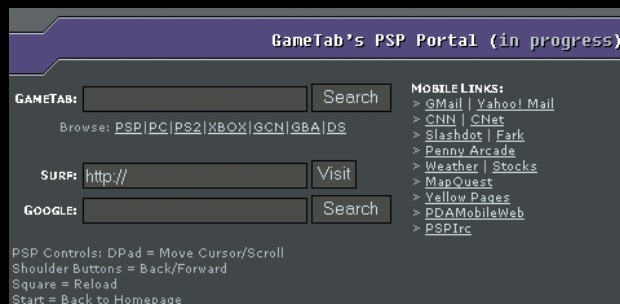
All Lexar Gaming Edition cards (option on 256MB, 512MB and 1GB pack) will feature an exclusive version of the Xploder Media Centre Lite software, allowing downloadable access to exclusive game saves, plus, a complete music management utility for storing your MP3s and importing your own CD collection and the facility to manage your digital photos.

Contents of the Blaze PSP accessories pack (standard for each PSP value pack option):

- Blaze Metal PSP Carry Case
- UMD Disk Cleaner
- USB Cable and Charger (this is not a separate charger; it is a split on the cable same as the one you received with Xploder PSP pack)
- 3 UMD Disk Cases
- Screen Protector
- Crystal Case (protects the full PSP and still allows gameplay - only the buttons are "exposed")

There will be three PSP value packs to choose from:

- Blaze / Lexar 256MB PSP Value Pack (256 MB Lexar Gaming Edition card + Blaze PSP Accessories pack) - RRP R652 incl VAT
- Blaze / Lexar 512MB PSP Value Pack (512 MB Lexar Gaming Edition card + Blaze PSP Accessories pack) - RRP R845 incl VAT
- Blaze / Lexar 1GB PSP Value Pack (1GB Lexar Gaming Edition card + Blaze PSP Accessories pack) - RRP R1445 incl VAT



PSP Web Portals

WHEN SONY RELEASED THE 2.0 Firmware update for the PSP, they included a nifty Web browser that lets you browse the Internet using the wireless functionality of the PSP.

Getting online with the PSP is a rather technical affair, requiring a wireless router that has an active connection to the Internet. If you have a wireless router in your house, office or know of a place that has a free wireless Internet connection, you can use that to browse the Web once your PSP has been set up to use it. You may have to ask for assistance, as each wireless Internet connection is unique in its setup and may require a WEP key (a password to access the network).

Once set up, you can go to the 'Web' option on your PSP and enter a URL to browse to. A lot of Websites on the Internet weren't really designed with the PSP in mind, and you may find that some Websites don't display well on the PSP.

Enter the PSP Web portal idea. A lot of users have created Websites that are small and easy to navigate, specifically to make browsing the Web easier on the PSP. They often provide links to other Websites that have formatting for the PSP's wide screen.

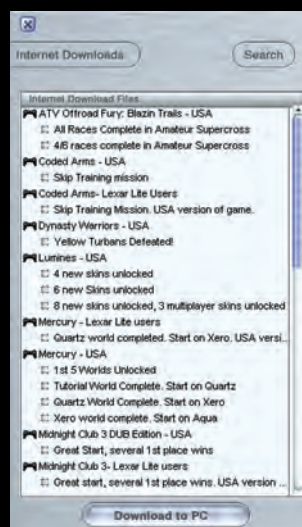
Once such Web portal is 67.171.70.72/wipeout/index.html, which contains easy links to popular tech, news and PSP related information. Currently the best Web portal for the PSP is the Gametab.com PSP Web portal, found at www.gametab.com/go/psp. It contains links to popular Web comics, news sites and much more.

As the PSP becomes more popular and more people start using the Web browser, you can expect to see more PSP Web portals appear, as well as 'Formatted especially for PSP' Websites.

Download Game Saves and Media

IF YOU HAVE XPLORDER for the PSP, you also have access to a large database of Game Saves and other media files. Click on the 'Internet Downloads' button in Xploder, and then click on 'Search'. From there, you can find Game Saves for games as well as wallpapers or other media for the PSP.

More and more files will be added to the Xploder database, as time passes. **NAG**



A large promotional image featuring four main characters from the movie 'The Warriors' in the foreground. They are all wearing red tank tops with black suspenders. The background shows a city street at night with a neon sign that says 'WONDER WHEEL'.

THE WARRIORS

COMING NOVEMBER 2005

WWW.ROCKSTARGAMES.COM/THEWARRIORS



PlayStation 2



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- Setup wizard simplifies wireless network establishment



WiFi TV Card

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- Edit video recorded on your camcorder with bundled authoring software
- Enjoy great multimedia experience with the bundled software

NOT the Other Way Around

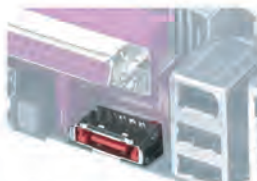


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- WiFi-TV card (WiFi-TV edition)
- AI NOS



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Flagship Audio Solution for home theatre level luxury

The P5LD2 Deluxe raised the bar in PC audio by incorporating Dolby Master Studio, the audio solution provider's flagship offering. The P5LD2 Deluxe motherboard is the ultimate PC entertainment solution that separates the sound connoisseurs from everyone else. At an affordable price, you can enjoy excellent sound performance on your PC.

- Intel 945P chipset
- FSB 1066/800/533
- DDR2 667/533/400
- Dolby Master Studio audio solution
- WiFi-TV Card (WiFi-TV edition)



No other 945P motherboard have higher audio specification



P5LD2-VM

The Best Intel All in One Solution with Dual Core CPU Support

The P5LD2-VM with Intel 945G chipset inside is an all-in-one solution. It supports Intel dual-core CPU and provides 1066 MHz FSB, PCI Express architecture, Serial ATA interface, dual-channel DDR memory, 8-channel HD Audio CODEC and Intel GbLAN. It especially supports Intel EM64T and EIST technology, which provide a 64-bit environment and an power saving solution.

- Intel 945G chipset
- Dual-Core CPU support
- Intel GMA950
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TECH NEWS

Age of Empires III Zboard Keyset

Some time ago we described Ideazon's innovative Zboard keyboards. These units consist of a base and a set of varying key sets that can be attached to the base. Each key set is designed with a specific game title in mind, and the keys themselves are marked with their functions within that game - a standard Windows key set is provided by default. A new key set is on its way, which will accommodate the complex interfacing needs of Microsoft's Age of Empires III.

"The Age of Empires III Limited Edition Keyset is tailored to meet every player's needs within the stunning new world that Ensemble has created for this game," says Chris Rathgeber, President of Ideazon Inc. "We worked closely with Ensemble Studios to create the ultimate custom keyset and we are thrilled with the results. We think gamers are going to love it."

[www.frontosa.co.za]



ACER GAMER'S LINE DISPLAYS

This new line of LCD monitors boasts an impressive feature set. Available in 17" and 19" models, these screens offer a contrast ratio of 700:1, brightness of 400cd/m² and a response time of 6ms. Furthermore, they are covered by a three-year collect, repair and return warranty. [www.acer.co.za]



NEW-LOOK FERRARI NOTEBOOK

If you are a Michael Schumacher fan, then this version of the Acer Ferrari 4000 notebook is a must-own item, if only to have people ooh and aah when they run their hands over the carbon fibre casing. It runs on the latest 64-bit technology, has standard wireless connectivity as well as a 15.4" TFT display. Oh, and the mouse is just as cool too. [www.acer.co.za]

LOGITECH PLAYGEAR

The company has recently expanded this range of PSP accessories, coinciding with the European launch of the handheld. The PlayGear Collection Kit consists of a PlayGear Pocket case (a tough polycarbonate case that combines protection and style) and two pairs of headphones with audio splitter, allowing two people to watch a movie simultaneously. Lastly, the package includes a wrist strap and a cleaning cloth. The PlayGear GamePack is a carrying solution that features a case and space for four UMDs and three Memory Sticks, as well as some additional room that can accommodate two more discs or a set of small earphones.



SONY PSP TALKMAN

This accessory for the handheld consists of a microphone and voice recognition software, with the mike connecting via the USB port. It supports English, Japanese, Chinese and Korean, and heralds the advent of USB-connected peripherals for the portable.





LOGITECH EXPANDS SPEAKER RANGE

Two new speaker sets are available from Logitech. The Z-4 model is a 2.1 system with satellites featuring three drivers apiece. It emphasises connectivity to portable devices by means of an auxiliary port. The Z-5450 Digital is the new flagship model. This is a 5.1 system with two independent wireless rear speakers with a range of up to 8.5 metres. The THX-certified system can decode Dolby Digital, DTS and DTS 96/24, includes a remote control (also wireless) and pumps out 315 Watts of sonic power.

[www.logitech.com]



PSP ACCESSORIES FROM 4GAMERS

The company has released a range of accessories for Sony's handheld. Most notable among these are the Sound and Charge System, and the 2.0 Sound and Dock System. The former focuses on prolonging battery life while on the move, while the latter is a desktop docking solution that provides power, charging, speakers and a tilting bracket, allowing the PSP to be used comfortably as a viewing device. Other products include alternative buttons with different sizes and shapes, for people who find the standard buttons uncomfortable, UMC carry cases, visors, straps, screen protectors and the like.

MICROSOFT LASER MOUSE 6000

This new laser-based mouse is primarily aimed at gamers who generally have higher precision requirements. The mouse can be switched from precision to speed mode or vice versa by the touch of a button, and boasts a thin, very flexible cord. Joining this mouse is the new Xbox 360 Controller for Windows, a device fashioned after the Xbox 360 controller, but intended for use with a PC.

[www.microsoft.co.za]



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onyx black



brilliant red



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NEW ERGONOMIC DESIGNS FROM MICROSOFT

The new Microsoft Natural Ergonomic Keyboard 4000 is an evolutionary development over the Microsoft Natural Keyboard which was released over 10 years ago. The new keyboard features a split design like its predecessor, and all its curves have been reassessed and adjusted to fit as naturally as possible to the curves of the hands. For traditionalists who shun the split design, Microsoft has introduced the Comfort Curve Keyboard 2000, which resembles a conventional keyboard, but incorporates a subtle curvature to improve posture and reduce repetitive strain injury. Rounding off the line-up is the Comfort Optical Mouse 3000, which offers an ergonomic ambidextrous design. [www.microsoft.co.za]



ALBATRON K8NF4X-754 MOTHERBOARD

This motherboard is designed to offer a good performance vs. cost ratio, and supports the AMD Sempron and AMD Athlon 64-bit 3800+ dual core chips. Salient features include nForce 4 4X chipset, two PCI Express slots, four SATA channels, 10/100Mbps LAN and 6-channel sound. A novel concept is the security card, which carries a copy of the BIOS. Should the BIOS on the board somehow become corrupted, the card can be inserted and the system booted up, repairing the BIOS. Overclocking and hardware monitoring software is included.

ATI R520

This new graphics chip is ATI's answer to NVIDIA's GeForce 7800GTX. Early units have performed well on the test-bench, and the company expects boards based on this GPU to compare very favourably with the latest GeForce generation. Release of graphics boards powered by this chip will be predated by the introduction of ATI's Crossfire dual graphics systems, similar to but slightly cheaper than SLI.



NEW WIDESCREEN GIZMONDO

This handheld device from Tiger Telematics complements and even supersedes the base model. The new version carries a 4" display, and is otherwise comparable to the older model. Essentially it is a Windows CE-powered handheld console with a wide range of connectivity options, including GSM phone functionality, e-mail access, Bluetooth and wireless networking, to name but a few. A 500MHz processor, 3D graphics processor and analogue TV outputs, as well as analogue stick controls built into the unit, allow it to be used as a full-fledged console. The Gizmondo suffered with the release of Sony's PSP, and this new model is Tiger's response, the company hoping to make more of an impact with this enhanced unit, which should be available next year.

NEW GENIUS CONTROLLERS

A range of new gaming controllers from Genius has been introduced by Azix. The MaxFighter F-31U is a full-featured joystick with a stronger motor for more powerful vibration effects. The MaxFire G-12PS is a game controller that can be used in either digital or analogue modes, and also provides vibration effects. The Speed Wheel 3 is a steering wheel and pedal set, also with vibration functions. The TwinWheel is a vibrating steering wheel with pedals that is compatible with PC and PlayStation 2. All of the above devices connect via USB.

PENTIUM EXTREME EDITION 955 EARLY NEXT YEAR

This new dual core chip from Intel will be built on the 65nm process, allowing somewhat higher speeds at reduced power consumption. Initial models will clock in at 3.46GHz. It will be accompanied by the 975X chipset, an upgrade of the 955X, offering a 1,066MHz front side bus and PCI2 x16 interface that can be split into two x8 channels for dual graphics.

PSP memory options

Expansion Memory Stick Pro Duo cards have become available for the PSP, in capacities of 256MB, 512MB, 1GB and 2GB. These units address the PSP's greatest weakness, its native shortage of storage.

Retro gaming watches from Fossil

Fossil and Atari have teamed up to deliver a line of fashion watches featuring themes from 80's videogames. Titles such as Centipede, Breakout and Asteroids will be represented.



PORTABLE MUSIC SOLUTIONS FROM SAITEK

The Saitek A-200 is a portable 2.1 speaker system designed for use with a portable music player. When 'deployed' for use, the unit expands a bit from its transport configuration, providing more space for the generation of bass frequencies. It connects to its source via a mini-jack, and can be powered by batteries or mains power. The A-250 is a larger unit with a rather different purpose – it features Bluetooth connectivity, so it can be used as a portable sound reproduction point for a fixed source, such as a PC. Its range is up to 30 metres (in open air). Its connection method, Bluetooth, allows it to be controlled as a Bluetooth headset without the need for driver software, and either its built-in hardware controls can be used, or those of the software used to play back the media.

LG ELECTRONICS M4410

This new mobile phone is aimed predominantly at car enthusiasts or other consumers who appreciate that kind of styling. The overall lines of the handset resemble those of a luxury sports car. The phone also emphasises its music playback features, and supports both MP3 and AAC formats. A MiniSD card slot allows content to be interchanged. The phone carries all the other features one would expect from a high-end mobile phone, as well as EGDE networking, an evolution of GPRS that ups the data transfer rate from 40Kbps to 200Kbps.



CREATIVE GIGAWORKS PROGAMER G500 SPEAKERS

This 5.1 system is primarily designed with the gamer in mind, and delivers 620W from a relatively small rig. Cabling is relatively simple, given that input is analogue. Overall, the design has been kept simple. Reviewers noted that for exclusively gaming-related applications, these speakers do the job really well, but that they fall down somewhat in terms of reproducing music, due to the acoustic dynamics built into the system, which promote the reproduction of sound effects (explosions, gunfire, and other noises common to computer games).

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Backup

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Backup Button



VP-1001LSF

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HARDWARE



* Screenshot simulated

CREATIVE ZEN

FOLLOWING IN THE FOOTSTEPS of the awesome Creative PMC (Portable Media Center), the Zen is a much more refined product with some hardware tweaks and beautiful aesthetics. The Zen is also quite a bit different from its predecessor. Not only is it almost half the PMC's size, but it features a 30GB hard drive to store music, movies and data. Creative also moved away from the Microsoft-like operating system and left out the green Media Center button, although this device is certified with the Windows "playsforsure" logo. The 3.7-inch screen displays videos and photos at a resolution of 640 x 480 and can reproduce 262,144 colours. The great thing about this device is that you literally only need Windows Media Player and a USB cable to transfer data or video and charge the unit at the same time. We were equally impressed that the Zen is compatible with most of today's popular video formats such as DivX4 and 5, XviD, WM9, MPEG-1, 2, and 4, as well as motion-JPEG. Controlling the Zen and scrolling the menu system is straight forward and easy to do, although we found that sometimes it was a little slow when jumping between a video and the menu. Bundled with the Zen is a set of AV cables which

allows it to be connected to a television - a great feature in our books. More than just an entertainment centre, the Zen can also be used for some other business related things. The Zen features a Personal Organizer which you can use to synchronise your Outlook calendar with and you can do voice recordings, which the Zen handles pretty well. If you take a lot of digital photos, you will love the fact that the Zen also has a CompactFlash slot situated on its side. You can use this slot to download data and images from your camera's CompactFlash card or get the optional 5-in-1 adapter for your other memory cards. If you plug the Zen into your PC, it can also be used as a 30GB portable hard drive - it actually has a special folder for data files which is invisible to the operating system and can only be seen if it is connected to a PC. The Creative Zen is definitely one of the most functional entertainment devices we have come across. The battery life is not bad either, although we would have loved it to last longer for video playback. In our tests, we were able to watch about three hours worth of video, while we got about 10 hours worth of audio playback. **NAG**

VITAL INFO

■ Pros

Picture clarity/quality;
Can be used as a portable drive;
CompactFlash slot;
Can be plugged into a TV

■ Cons

Battery life, when playing back videos, is only about three hours

■ Supplier

Reviva [021] 409 7952

■ Internet

www.reviva.co.za

■ RRP

R 4,500

■ Reviewer

Regardt van der Berg

EVERCOOL NEON CRAB

THE NEON CRAB IS an innovative RAM cooler which uses active cooling, via two 40mm fans, to keep your memory modules running cool. Each of the fans runs whisper quiet and features a blue LED. There are also two flashing LEDs mounted on the top of this unit which resemble the eyes of a crab - when you turn this cooler on its side it looks pretty much like a crab, hence the name. The Neon Crab was designed to clamp onto a single memory module using its spring loaded legs. Each clamp also features a padded foot which will ensure that it does not cause damage to your RAM modules. On the downside, the foot of the clamp does not keep it in perfect position on the memory module and it tends to shift about 4mm to either side if you move your PC around. Having said that, we were unable to get it to dislodge from the memory. We are confident that even if you carry your PC around, this cooler will stay in place. Looking at its cooling performance, we were impressed to find that it cooled our KingMax DDRII 667MHz between eight to ten degrees under benchmark conditions. The only other concern we had was that this cooler might not fit onto all motherboard configurations. Depending on the size of your CPU heatsink, you might want to test-fit this cooler to make sure it will work in your PC. **NAG**

VITAL INFO

■ Pros

Works surprisingly well;
Flashy lights

■ Cons

It is bulky and might
not fit onto all
configurations

■ Supplier

Naked IT
[011] 678 1288

■ Internet

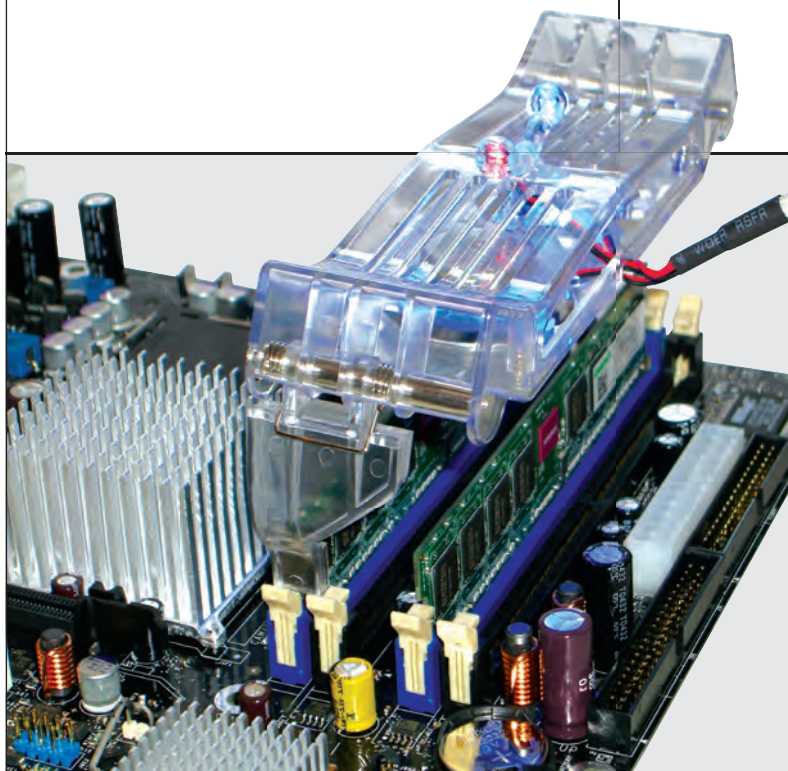
www.nakedit.co.za

■ RRP

R 99

■ Reviewer

Regardt van der Berg



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SAMSUNG SGH-E530

SAMSUNG HAS DELIGHTED US (all 300 of us), at the NAG headquarters (all 3,000m² of sprawling office buildings, rolling lawns, garden gnomes, koi ponds and a Zozo hut), with another of its cellphone gems. As any other reviewer out there would tell you, we all tore into each other trying to get our clammy little paws on Samsung's latest offering. I, being the tallest of the staff members, easily overpowered everyone else and ended up with the review cellphone (it supposedly had something to do with my dashing Scandinavian mixed with German looks, my height – six feet four inches – and my weight advantage). And then I was sent to spend some time alone in the Zozo hut.

So there I was, sitting staring at myself in my desktop mirror (Carly Simon was singing something about “You’re so vain” in my earphones) as I took the Samsung SGH-E530 out of its box. I was taken aback by its diminutive size, extremely light weight and its colour – lavender pink. Try and imagine the scenario: a miniscule pink cellphone and quite a big bloke. I later found out that the SGH-E530 is squarely aimed at women with its ‘Women’s Life Functions’, which assist women in calculating their BMI, their ovulation cycle and some other interesting little things. My wrists started flapping, I started sitting funny and I walked with my arse clenched. I even know when I’m supposed to ovulate (the phone calculated it for me), but I’ll give this momentous

occasion in my life a miss (sorry Samsung). I do however suffer from PMS at the moment.

Samsung’s SGH-E530 is an amazing little phone, nevertheless. It packs a lot of power and functionality for a phone its size (measuring only 85.9 x 42.2 x 27mm and weighing 86g). It’s a dual-band phone with a 1 megapixel camera with flash, which takes good pictures at a resolution of 1152 x 864 and has 4x digital zoom. The SGH-E530 has 92MB of internal memory for extra Java applications, MP3s (the phone has a built-in MP3-player) and photos. The phone can also capture video in MPEG-4 and H.263 formats. The internal 176 x 220 pixel 262K colour TFT LCD screen (the E530 is a clamshell design cellphone) is crystal clear and easy on the eye. The external screen is low-res and provides vital information such as battery life, caller ID and the time. Data transfer and PIM synchronisation with a PC is quick and easy, either through Bluetooth or the supplied USB cable. The E530 has a Lithium-ion 850mAh battery, good enough for up to 330 minutes of talk time and a claimed standby time of 200 hours.

All-in-all, the E530 is a little gem, again demonstrating Samsung’s attention to quality and detail. Samsung’s cellphones are fast becoming fashion accessories, as recently demonstrated when French designer Franck Sorbier featured the SGH-E530 in his fashion show in Paris. **NAG**

VITAL INFO

■ Pros

Diminutive size;
Megapixel camera with flash;
Generous amount of
internal memory;
Excellent video playback;
‘Women’s Life Functions’;
perfect for its intended
market

■ Cons

Not 3G-enabled;
Pink is not a good colour for
a cellphone

■ Supplier

Samsung [011] 549 1500

■ Internet

www.samsung.co.za

■ RRP

R 2,999

■ Reviewer

Nati de Jager

ZALMAN FATAL1TY FS-C77

REMEMBER FEBRUARY 2005, WHEN we reviewed the Zalman CNPS7700Cu? Remember its silent annihilation of heat? Well, say hello to its bad brother, the FATAL1TY FS-C77 cooler.

Developed in cooperation with Zalman and Johnathan "Fatal1ty" Wendel (world champion PC gamer), this monster was designed to offer gamers the best possible cooling power without worrying about CPU temperatures. To quote Mr. Wendel: "My vision for Fatal1ty hardware is to allow gamers to focus on the game without worrying about their equipment..."

Apart from being packaged in a black box with references to Johnathan "Fatal1ty" Wendel everywhere to be seen, the FATAL1TY FS-C77 is anodised in a deep red. Incorporated within the radial cooler's 126 interlocked plates is a clear 120mm red LED-lit fan, capable of speeds up to 2,400rpm. It weighs in and has the same dimensions as the Zalman CNPS7700Cu: 918g in weight, and 136mm (length) x 136mm (width) x 67mm (height) respectively.

Fan speed is up by 400rpm (the difference can definitely be heard at maximum power), but there is a decrease in the number of plates from 134 to 126 in the FATAL1TY. Even with the decrease in cooling plates, the heat dissipation area is still equal at a staggering 3,268cm².

As with the Zalman, the FATAL1TY FS-C77 cooler does not support all motherboards. Due to the design of the cooler, any components with a height in excess of 14mm within a radius of 44mm from the centre of the CPU core will obstruct the cooler. Refer to Zalman's Website www.zalmanusa.com for a list of compatible motherboards.

The following CPUs are supported: Intel Pentium 4 Socket 775 (all speeds) and Socket478 (all speeds); and AMD Sempron/AMD64 Socket 754/939/940 (all speeds).

The FATAL1TY FS-C77 installs easily and is rapidly able to decimate heat and leave nothing but cold bodies/components in its wake. If you are a serious gamer and serious about hardware, this is the cooler for you. **NAG**

VITAL INFO

Pros

Powerful cooler;
Killer looks

Cons

Not compatible with all motherboards due to its weight and size;
Makes transportation of PC difficult

Supplier

Frontosa
[011] 466 0038

Internet

www.frontosa.co.za

RRP

R 595

Reviewer

Victor Moore



My digital Discovery

AOpen®



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KINGWIN AS3000 - NIGHTHAWK WATER COOLING KIT

A RELATIVE UNKNOWN TO MOST, Kingwin was founded over a decade ago in China and Taiwan as a specialist in the design and manufacturing of CPU coolers and mobile racks. Their mission: to provide customers with the best thermal cooling and storage solutions.

Their latest offering to the Cooling gods: the AS3000 Nighthawk Liquid Cooling Solution.

At the heart of the Nighthawk is an aluminium case housing a quiet submersible water pump, radiator and two cooling fans. The front of the unit houses an 80mm intake fan on the left with a similar fan at the rear. The front-side fan is speed adjustable and illuminated by means of blue LEDs. A circular display with a fan speed control button and water flow indicator is found to the right. The display is unusual in that it allows for the selection of several different colours, depending on your mood or requirements (green, red, blue, yellow, light blue, pink, white and colour cycle). The display indicates fan speed, pump operation, dB noise, temperature and water level.

Of note must be the Nighthawk's strongest point – ease of use. All that is required is for you to decide whether it will be installed internally or externally (internally requires the use of two 5¼-inch drive bays). The water blocks are immaculately machined and manufactured and easily attach to the CPU and GPU. The coolant pipes are able to be sized rapidly and

effortlessly and coupled using screw-on connectors. All that is then required is to fill the Nighthawk with the supplied antifreeze and water. Once powered, the Nighthawk 'bleeds' itself and purges all air trapped in the system to be functional in minutes. The power and communication cables are all bundled into one serial cable connected to the rear of the Nighthawk.

The bundle comes with all the required bits and pieces to attach the CPU water block to the following CPUs - Intel P3 and P4, Intel LGA 775; and AMD K7 and K8.

In addition, the Nighthawk has coupling pieces to attach a GPU water block to NVIDIA and ATI GPUs.

A novel feature of the Nighthawk is the introduction of a dB sensor, which is not of much use if the unit is fitted on the outside of the case though.

The Nighthawk does have a few downsides however. It does not have the best cooling ability of liquid cooling solutions to date, and the adjustable intake fan can be rather noisy. Also, we found the adjustment buttons frustrating as getting the Nighthawk to display °C became an issue.

The Nighthawk cooling solution is truly inspiring. Kingwin has managed to produce a unit that is both aesthetically unlike anything else on the market, as well as being exceptionally easy to install and use. Add to this the ability to use it internally or externally, and you have a winner. **NAG**

VITAL INFO

■ Pros

Cooler look in town;
Easiest installation;
Fantastic water blocks

■ Cons

Noisy front fan;
Not suitable for overclocking

■ Supplier

Naked IT [011] 482 5493

■ Internet

www.nakedit.co.za

■ RRP

R 1,199

■ Reviewer

Victor Moore

LOGITECH G5 MOUSE

LOGITECH RECENTLY LAUNCHED ITS new G series of peripherals. The G stands for gaming, and all these products are designed with gamers in mind. The G5 is the corded version of the G7 mouse, and features Logitech's new 2,000dpi laser engine as the main optical system. If you've seen what mice pro-gamers like Fatal1ty actually play with, you'll know that 2,000dpi is far above what is needed for even competition level gameplay. The sensitivity is adjustable on-mouse and has an indicator to show the current level.

However, the G5 brings another innovation. Like the Razer Copperhead, its main competitor, the G5 has a system of adjustable weights that the user can install in the mouse. While this may seem silly at first, it is actually quite revolutionary. The weight card has eight slots, each of which can take a 4.5 or 1.7 gram weight or nothing. This allows tweaking of the mouse's weight and centre of gravity. It can compensate for the uneven torque that your hand exerts when moving the mouse. The optical sensor is also offset to be closer to the centre of mass of the hand instead of the centre of the mouse.

As for other features, this is a large heavy mouse. If you have large hands, it will probably be comfortable. If your hands are a bit small, you may want to look into another mouse. No amount of resolution will compensate for a lack of comfort when playing, as cramped or overstretched muscles are far less responsive.

So, the G5 lets you choose between a light mouse, which is easy for quick flick-of-the-wrist turnarounds, a heavy mouse, which dampens jitter and allows for precise pixel-perfect aim, or anything in-between. This will be the main advantage for gamers, not the pie in the sky dpi boasts. **NAG**

VITAL INFO

Pros

High quality;
Revolutionary weight system

Cons

Only one thumb button;
Expensive

Supplier

Digital Channel Solutions
[011] 466 5099

Internet

www.logitech.com

RRP

R 799

Reviewer

Toby Hudon



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CREATIVE LABS SOUNDBLASTER XTREME-FIDELITY SERIES

CREATIVE LABS IS CURRENTLY the undisputed leader in providing hardware-accelerated audio solutions for the gaming market. It's a bit of a hollow leadership position of course, as Creative is also the only company still in the game.

With CPU performance ever escalating and integrated audio solutions taking advantage of this fact to provide high-quality sound by default, the realm of sound cards has been relegated to audio professionals and gamers who insist on ensuring that each and every facet of their systems is just perfect.

This leads us to this release: Creative Labs' latest sonic development - the SoundBlaster X-Fi range of add-in audio solutions. The offerings span from a low-end 'standard' X-Fi PCI card up to the full-bore (and very expensive) X-Fi Professional. There's even a Fatal1ty branded option in-between these two extremes.

This is no EMU10K2.5 evolution of the aging EMU10K chipset, like the Audigy is either. This is an all-new architecture: X-Fi. And specifications have taken a leap accordingly. The processor powering the new family, for instance, packs in 51 million transistors - over 10 times the amount of the preceding model. This core runs at twice the frequency, 400MHz in fact, to deliver the claimed performance of the X-Fi architecture.

This kind of improvement is largely a result of the interesting Audio Ring architecture built between the main audio engines of the card and the system itself through the PCI bus. Add the exponentially-expanded raw performance of the X-Fi processor, now capable of over 10,000MIPS, and

the integrated 64MB of X-RAM on the high-end variants (a mere 2MB on the lower-priced packages), and you may well start to think that perhaps this new SoundBlaster could well deliver.

We tested both an entry-level X-Fi Music and a range-topping X-Fi Elite Pro to firstly find out if the performance boost could be true, and secondly what the difference between the two ends of the X-Fi range is.

Benchmarking this kind of performance increment is trickier than normal. Sure, RightMark would show us the precise CPU utilisation of the audio engine, but we wanted real-world results. Only one retail game currently supports the capabilities of the X-Fi completely (Battlefield 2), so most of the results are based on benchmarking this title repeatedly, with an old-school gaming benchmark thrown in to try and confirm any performance differences.

Two baselines were tested as well: an integrated Intel HD Audio solution and an original EMU10K1 SoundBlaster Live! PCI card. Everything else about the system remained identical, so framerate differences could be attributable to the audio card only.

Straight into Battlefield 2. As ultra high quality sound is only available to X-Fi users, the integrated and older solutions were tested at high quality, while both new cards were tested at both quality levels. We used a short custom demo from a 16-player LAN game featuring a lot of radio chatter and action, running at low detail to isolate the audio performance further.

Immediately, the on-board system lost out to the add-in

VITAL INFO

■ Pros

Excellent audio quality; Some great advanced features and a definite gaming performance advantage

■ Cons

Expels quite a lot of heat into your system; Price

■ Supplier

Rectron [011] 203 1000

■ Internet

www.rectron.co.za

■ RRP

X-Fi Music R1100
X-Fi Elite Pro R3200

■ Reviewer

Russell Bennett

cards, scoring the lowest average framerate of 85.558. The venerable Live! represented a substantial leap and recorded 99.154 frames on the map. From here on however, the performance margin shrunk to mere fractions of percentages, as the X-Fi Music managed 99.777 and the Elite Pro 99.972.

The good news is that both new cards continued to beat the SB Live!, even with the quality turned to the X-Fi-only ultra high setting. It sounded really good too. Directions from which sounds were coming came through better, and the whole environment seemed subtly but noticeably more tangible. Even in identical high quality mode, the latest cards generated a distinctly superior ambience.

In fact, the X-Fi processor is now capable of generating twice the amount of voices the Audigy 2 can, working at it's hardest - 127 voices to be exact. This is one aspect of the new architecture which allows for the scope to create a richer and more engaging audio experience, particularly over a surround sound system.

Over to the old-tech wildcard then. The 3DMark 03 benchmark suite includes a section for measuring the gaming performance of your audio subsystem.

Unfortunately the Intel HD audio wouldn't run the audio bench at all, its hardware not recognisable by the old software application. Handling 24 sound samples, the EMU10K1 dragged framerates down to 69.8fps, and it couldn't cope with more samples than that.

The Music and Pro X-Fi variants bettered this performance comfortably, but were very difficult to separate despite one having only 2MB and the other 64MB of X-RAM. For the cheaper model, 78.4fps with 24 sounds and 70.1fps with 60 sounds playing represents a decent jump over the older SoundBlaster. The Pro beats that, with scores of 79.2fps and 71.7fps respectively.

Although the remainder of the current crop of games we tested, like GTR Racing, Half-Life 2 and Lord of the Rings: BFME, showed no real tangible performance benefits for the X-Fi, a very 'unofficial' test using Fraps and BloodRayne 2 showed a performance delta of over 30% in favour of the new models, without specific support for the new Creative architecture built into the game by Majesco either. This bodes well for future gaming on this new product.

So, 15% more gaming performance over integrated platforms? Believable, and for games using modern audio subsystems the boost factor could prove even higher.

As for the price delta between the Pro and Music versions, it's visible from the moment you open the box. The Music comes alone and dwarfed in its container, with just a quick-install guide and installation CD for company. The Pro includes a great audio control centre breakout box complete with remote control, a bit chunky for our taste but very nice to have, and a full complement of ancillary connectors. The card itself is more substantial overall, the PCB jam-packed with electronics.

Worth the price? Frankly, at their current prices, neither seems like great value. Once Creative has amortised its R&D investments and the prices have settled to more believable levels, we'd have to suggest the Pro even if only for the sheer coolness of a sound card with 64MB of X-RAM. **NAG**



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GAMING NOTEBOOKS

THE NOTEBOOK HAS ALWAYS been seen as a business tool, but with advances in hardware technology we are more frequently seeing notebooks with mid-range to high-end specifications capable of running most of today's games.

Looking at today's average notebook specifications, we are seeing notebooks with 2GHz and 3GHz processors and memory between 256MB to 2GB. The only hardware required for gaming that is missing from the equation is a decent graphics card. Both ATI and NVIDIA have always developed hardware for this platform, but recently the race has become as fierce as it is in the desktop graphics card arena.

So what do you need to look out for when it comes to choosing a gaming notebook? Let's break it down and look at each component.

Form Factor

Unlike the notebook targeted at the business user, a gaming notebook should be much larger. The main reason for the increased size is the larger LCD gamers generally prefer.

Battery

Because of its generally larger form factor (larger LCD) and high-end specifications, the gaming notebook of today cannot provide many hours of battery life. Generally, these machines would be able to play games between an hour and a half to two hours on battery power, depending on your game and

system settings. In all fairness though, most gamers do not buy a gaming notebook for the capability to play on battery power, but rather to have a powerful PC that they can easily carry around.

Graphics

As mentioned before, both ATI and NVIDIA have made significant advances in the mobile graphics market segment. In fact, both manufacturers have high-end mobile graphics chipsets which put them on par with their desktop counterparts. However, the most popular graphics chipsets are the ATI X600 and

NVIDIA GeForce Go 6600. Both of these are mid-range chipsets and provide reasonable graphics performance. Going to the high-end chipsets such as the ATI Mobility Radeon X800 and the NVIDIA GeForce GO 7800GTX, you can expect to pay a lot more, but these notebooks are fairly hard to come by locally.

RAM

Traditionally, 512MB of RAM is recommended for the average notebook user, but for gamers we recommend much more. As is the case with desktop PCs, 1GB of RAM should be more than sufficient for most of your gaming needs. Most





THE ULTIMATE GAMING NOTEBOOK

When it comes to the ultimate gaming notebook there are two notebooks that stand out above the rest. These are Dell's Inspiron XPS Gen 2 and Alienware's Area-51 range. Apart from featuring high-end specifications, these notebooks have been designed with the gamer in mind and feature funky aesthetics and tweaked gaming performance. Unfortunately for us, neither Dell nor Alienware officially bring these notebooks into the country, so we were not able to get some seed units for review.

new Intel-based notebooks today have the added benefit of supporting DDR2, which requires only 1.8V of power (which is a great power saver).

Hard Drives

Until recently, the biggest capacity notebook hard drive available was 80GB. However, Seagate recently launched a 100GB 5,400rpm hard drive which we highly recommend. You also have the option of purchasing a faster 7,200rpm hard drive (not available in 100GB capacity), but these are also hard to come by locally.

HOW WE TESTED

WHEN IT CAME TO benchmarking, this month's roundup was fairly tricky. The main problem we faced was to make sure that all the notebooks were similarly configured. The problem was that each manufacturer had installed a set of performance and power optimisers which is fine for the end-user, but it was a benchmarking nightmare.

Once we had disabled all of these features, we proceeded with the benchmarking. We ran the usual arsenal of benchmark applications which focused on the system and graphics side of things. We used Benchemall to run some of the applications which it supports, such as the 3DMarks, Quake III, Far Cry and UT2004. When it came to the battery life benchmark, we disabled all the power optimising features and set each notebook to run at full power - i.e. the CPU ran at its rated clock speed. We then ran 3DMark05 and had it loop its first four tests. We measured the time from when we unplugged the power adapter to when the battery level reached 10%.



ACER TRAVELMATE 8104WLMi

THIS MIGHT LOOK LIKE yet another notebook, but we were very impressed with Acer's submission in this month's roundup. The TravelMate 8104WLMi features an impressive 100GB of hard drive space, 1GB of DDR2 533MHz RAM as well as an Intel Pentium M 760 (2.0GHz) processor.

Aesthetically, this notebook is not bad either, although we would have preferred some tweaks here and there. The LCD on this unit is a 15.4-inch WSXGA TFT LCD and is driven by a 128MB ATI Radeon X700, which is a great all-round performing graphics chipset in the notebook arena. Interestingly, the built-in keyboard is slightly curved on both ends, allowing your palms to rest in a natural position - great if you will be typing long e-mails or other

documents. We were also quite pleased with the layout of the I/O ports on this unit. On the front you have the audio jacks and a 4-in-1 card reader. The Acer TravelMate 8104WLMi also sports two switches on the front panel which allow you to toggle the Bluetooth and Wi-Fi on or off without having to do so from within a software application. We have seen a few notebooks with external switches such as these, yet we were surprised to see that not all vendors have caught onto this trend.

Looking a little closer at the built-in Wi-Fi on the Acer TravelMate 8104WLMi, we were again impressed to see that it is compatible with all three of today's commercially available wireless networks: 802.11a, 802.11b and 802.11g. The optical drive, built into this notebook, is capable of



writing to both DVD+R/W and DVD-R/W discs as well as Dual Layer discs. One of the only things we could find fault with on the Acer TravelMate 8104WLMi was that it lacked a decent bundle.

Considering its price (granted it has high-end specifications), it would have been nice to see at least a notebook bag or mouse included with it. Looking at its benchmarks results and specifications, the Acer TravelMate 8104WLMi is our gaming notebook of choice. Its game performance is really great and you should be able to play any game at a reasonable resolution.

The 100GB hard drive and 1GB of DDR2 RAM will also ensure that both your gaming and business experience will be great. **NAG**

On the front of the notebook are two speakers alongside on/off switches for both the Bluetooth and Wi-Fi connections. This Acer notebook also features three USB ports on its right side, and you can buy an optional expansion bay

VITAL INFO

- **Plus**
100GB hard drive
1GB RAM
- **Minus**
Bundle
- **Warranty**
1 year
- **Bundle**
Power adapter
Acer Recovery CD
- **Supplier**
Acer [0861] 653-653
- **Internet**
www.acer.co.za
- **RRP**
R18,999

SPECS

- **CPU**
Intel Pentium M 760 (2.0GHz)
- **RAM**
1GB DDR2 533MHz
- **HDD**
100GB
- **Graphics**
128MB ATI Radeon X700
- **LCD**
15.4-inch TFT

VALUE 90 PERFORMANCE 90 FEATURES 90

OVERALL

90

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LG LW70 EXPRESS

UPON UNPACKING THE LG LW70, it becomes obvious that this is no ordinary notebook. What immediately sets it apart from its competitors is its physical size, which is larger than usual due to its 17.1-inch WXGA TFT LCD.

On the technical specifications LG mentions that this LCD uses Fine Bright technology, which is in actual fact just the shiny coating that seems to be the trend on notebooks these days. The large screen also provides the added benefit that the LG can accommodate both a keyboard and a number pad, which is great for both gaming and slightly more serious business use. Keeping in mind that this notebook is geared for entertainment, LG also includes two nifty InstantOn features. These allow you to listen to a music CD or watch a DVD without booting into the operating system. These features are not completely new to the notebook industry, but are still great features to have on any notebook. The LG LW70 Express features four USB 2.0 ports, one parallel printer port, a PS/2 port and a mini IEEE-1394 port. On the left side of the notebook you will also find two PCMCIA slots

and a 2-in-1 card reader which can accommodate both an SD Card and a Sony Memory Stick. Interestingly, this notebook can produce 5.1 channel sound and can also output sound in six channels to an amplifier or speaker set. The built-in speakers are also quite loud and are sufficient for both gaming and watching DVDs. Looking at this as a gaming notebook, it is not bad, although it is the only one in the roundup to sport an ATI Radeon Mobility X600 graphics chipset. Looking at its CPU, the LW70 Express features an Intel Pentium M 750 (1.86GHz) processor as well as a Mobile Intel 915 Express chipset and Intel Pro/Wireless 2200BG wireless adapter. All that these three technologies mean is that the LG is a second generation Centrino certified notebook. The one thing we were a little disappointed about was the bundle that ships with this notebook. It simply does not have much in terms of extras.

LG's LW70 Express is a great notebook in many ways and its large screen is awesome. Sadly, it falls short in the benchmark results due to its graphics chipset. **NAG**

VITAL INFO

Plus

Large 17.1-inch screen;
InstantOn feature allows you to watch a DVD or listen to music without booting up the notebook

Minus

Bundle
Benchmark results

Warranty

1 year international

Bundle

Power adapter
Recovery CD
InstantOn player software
Cyberlink PowerDVD
Nero Burning ROM 6.3.1.4

Supplier

LG [0800] 54 54 54

Internet

www.lge.co.za

RRP

R16,500

SPECS

CPU

Intel Pentium M 750
(1.86GHz)

RAM

512MB DDR2

HDD

80GB

Graphics

128MB ATI Radeon
Mobility X600

LCD

17.1-inch TFT

VALUE PERFORMANCE FEATURES

80 75 85

OVERALL

80

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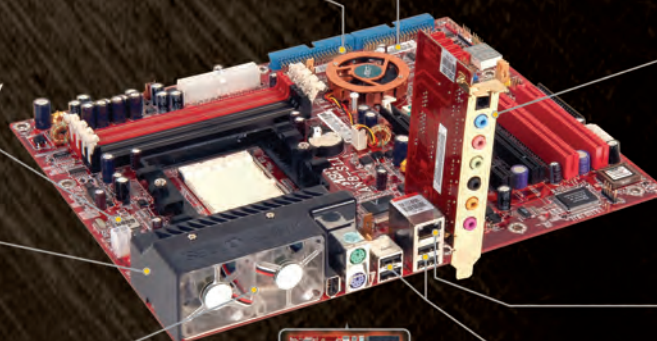


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MSI M645

MSI HAS BEEN PRODUCING other computer hardware components and we were pleased to find that their notebooks are equally impressive. The MSI M645 is also the only notebook in our roundup to sport the NVIDIA GeForce Go 6600 graphics chipset with 128MB of dedicated memory available to it.

Under the hood you will find that this notebook sports an Intel Pentium M 1.6GHz processor with 512MB of DDR2 memory. The LCD on this unit is measured at 15.4 inches, which is pretty standard these days, and can handle a maximum resolution of 1280 x 800. Having worked with many different notebooks, we were impressed with the shape and aesthetics of the MSI M645. It features clean lines and no unnecessary frills. Sadly, it is just a little too basic in our books and we would have liked to see some added features such as an external Wi-Fi switch.

Nevertheless, MSI included front audio jacks and volume controls as well as a mini IEEE-1394 port. On the right side of this notebook are two USB 2.0 ports, a single 9-pin D-Sub

video-out port, as well as an S-Video port. As is the norm these days, the MSI M645 also includes a 4-in-1 memory card reader and an older PCMCIA card slot. Looking at the left side of this notebook, you will find two more USB 2.0 ports, one 10/100 Ethernet port and an RJ-11 telephone socket for the dial-up modem. It also came as no surprise to see that MSI have included a Dual Layer DVD Writer with this notebook. It goes without saying that this notebook also includes a built-in 802.11b/g wireless adapter. Looking at its benchmark results, there is not much that sets it apart from the other notebooks. It is interesting to note however, that the NVIDIA GeForce Go 6600 produced some impressive scores in comparison to its ATI counterpart in the other notebooks.

Apart from some external access buttons, we would have liked to see on this notebook, the only other aspect that disappointed us was the lack of a decent bundle. Considering its very affordable price however, we are willing to buy any extras ourselves. **NAG**

VITAL INFO

■ Plus

Price
Dual Layer DVD Writer

■ Minus

Bundle

■ Warranty

1 year

■ Bundle

Power adapter
Recovery CD

■ Supplier

Pinnacle Micro
[011] 265-3000

■ Internet

www.pinnacle.co.za

■ RRP

R10,999

SPECS

■ CPU

Intel Pentium M (1.6GHz)

■ RAM

512MB DDR2

■ HDD

60GB

■ Graphics

128MB NVIDIA
GeForce Go 6600

■ LCD

15.4-inch TFT

VALUE PERFORMANCE FEATURES

90 80 80

OVERALL

83

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Wizardronics: 011-699 6015



GIGABYTE W511A

OUT OF ALL THE submissions for this month's roundup, Gigabyte is the youngest in the notebook market segment. Having just recently launched their notebook range, we were eager to see what they are capable of. We can thus report that the Gigabyte W511A is an impressive notebook. It features a 15.4-inch TFT LCD which is driven by the powerful ATI Mobility Radeon X700.

The CPU, inside the notebook we received for review, was the Intel Pentium M 740 (1.73GHz) processor and it had 512MB of DDR2 RAM. One of the features that Gigabyte impressed us with was the layout of its connectivity ports. On the front you will find the audio ports (line-in, microphone and headphone), a USB 2.0 port and an on/off switch for both the Bluetooth and Wi-Fi connections. On the right side of the notebook are a 4-in-1 memory card reader, PCMCIA slot, mini IEEE-1394 port and two more USB 2.0 ports. This notebook also has an RJ-11 connector for the dial-up modem as well as an RJ-45 connector for the Gigabit Ethernet.

We were also pleased to see the inclusion of an S-Video

port. Looking at the back of the W511A, you will find one 9-pin D-Sub VGA connector as well as the port replicator connector which allows you to attach this notebook to a port replicator device which will increase the expansion options, such as IEEE-1394 and USB 2.0 ports for your notebook.

One of the most impressive features about this notebook is the supplied bundle. Granted, none of the bundled accessories are actually ground-breaking, but it still is a great bonus to get some extras with your newly purchased notebook. The bundled software includes a Cyberlink DVD software suite which is a collection of DVD editing and rendering software, as well as Cyberlink PowerCinema. Gigabyte also included a corded optical USB mouse (which is great for travelling) and a mini remote control for managing music and video playback if you want to watch a movie or listen to music from the comfort of your armchair.

Performance wise, Gigabyte's W511A was pretty much on par with its competitors, while its battery life was the most impressive of the lot. **NAG**

VITAL INFO

■ Plus

Battery life
Bundle
Multimedia remote

■ Minus

More RAM would be handy

■ Warranty

1 year

■ Bundle

Cyberlink PowerCinema
Cyberlink DVD software suite
Notebook optical mouse
Multimedia remote

■ Supplier

Rectron [011] 203-1000

■ Internet

www.rectron.net

■ RRP

R12,999

SPECS

■ CPU

Pentium M 740 (1.73 GHz)

■ RAM

512MB DDR2

■ HDD

60GB

■ Graphics

128MB ATI Radeon X700

■ LCD

15.4-inch TFT

VALUE 85 PERFORMANCE 85 FEATURES 85

OVERALL

85

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Intel 945P+ICH7R



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- FSB 1066MHZ



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ASUS M6S00VA

ASUS IS A BRAND that has become synonymous with great quality and their submission for this month's roundup is no exception. Strangely enough, when looking at the Asus M6S00VA it appears as if its screen and overall size is larger than what it actually is. But we have concluded that it is its dark colour scheme and great TFT LCD that is the culprit to this deception.

The screen size of this notebook is 15.4 inches and it is driven by an ATI Mobility Radeon X700 which produced impressive scores in our benchmark results. Looking at its other specifications, the Asus M6S00VA features an Intel Pentium M 750 (1.86GHz) processor and has 512MB of DDR2 memory. Its other features include built-in 802.11a/b/g, while its optical drive is capable of writing to Dual Layer DVDs.

The design of this notebook is also a little different to what we are used to. The bottom end of the notebook is tucked away and makes this notebook appear to sit higher than what it is. The downside to this design is that the optical drive is 'hidden' under the notebook and it can be

tricky to reach the eject button.

On the left side of the notebook Asus also built in playback control buttons which can be used when you listen to audio on your notebook. Again, the downside here is that there are no external volume controls (apart from the one you control via the keyboard) which sort of defies the purpose of the external controls.

On the plus side however, we were very satisfied with the bundle that you get with this notebook. This bundle consists of a Logitech Notebook Optical Mouse Plus (which has a wind-up USB cord), as well as a stylish carry case for your new notebook. There is also a handful of bundled software such as Nero and Cyberlink PowerDirector DE.

As mentioned, its benchmark results were impressive and we were pleased with the performance of this notebook. It performs on par with similarly spec'd computers and in some cases outperforms them too.

All-in-all, this is a great notebook with a bundle that adds a lot of value to it. **NAG**

VITAL INFO

Plus

Many bundles
Support hot swap for HDD/ODD

Minus

No external volume control

Warranty

2 year international

Bundle

Logitech Notebook Optical Mouse Plus
Asus DVD Player software
Cyberlink MediaShow SE 2.0
Cyberlink PowerDirector DE
Nero Burning ROM 6.3.1.25
Carry bag

Supplier

Drive Control [011] 887 8927
Proton Technology
[011] 486-0748

Internet

www.asus.co.za

RRP

R18,239

SPECS

CPU

Pentium M 750 (1.86GHz)

RAM

512MB DDR2

HDD

60GB

Graphics

128MB ATI Radeon X700

LCD

15.4-inch TFT

VALUE PERFORMANCE FEATURES

88 88 85

OVERALL

87

BENCHMARKS

Acer TravelMate 8104WLMi

LG LW70 Express

MSI M64S

Gigabyte W511A

Asus M6500VA

TEST

3DMark05

1024x768	2231	1236	2348	2305	2387
----------	------	------	------	------	------

Doom 3

1024x768	59.5	42.2	61.3	62.5	60.1
----------	------	------	------	------	------

1600x1200	40.7	33.1	48.6	43.2	43.2
-----------	------	------	------	------	------

Far Cry

1024x768	36.59	31.21	39.53	38.55	34.88
----------	-------	-------	-------	-------	-------

1600x1200	19.54	15.36	17.77	18.35	17.49
-----------	-------	-------	-------	-------	-------

UT 2004

1024x768	154.50	136.30	150.91	152.11	145.33
----------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------

1600x1200	87.26	75.23	82.55	81.20	83.50
-----------	-------	-------	-------	-------	-------

3DMark03

1024x768	5695	3132	5472	6072	5706
----------	------	------	------	------	------

Quake III

1024x768	311.3	225.8	325.5	319.1	311.6
----------	-------	-------	-------	-------	-------

SiSoft CPU Arithmetic

Dhryston	8533	7954	7850	7395	7917
----------	------	------	------	------	------

Whetstone	2766/3546	2584/3302	2223/2840	2400/3069	2570/3288
-----------	-----------	-----------	-----------	-----------	-----------

CPU Multimedias

Integer	18973	17706	16238	16453	17619
---------	-------	-------	-------	-------	-------

Floating point	20871	19489	16782	18123	19401
----------------	-------	-------	-------	-------	-------

Integer buff	2947	2025	2501	2402	2931
--------------	------	------	------	------	------

Floating point buff	2923	2025	2509	2403	2942
---------------------	------	------	------	------	------

Passmark Performance Test

Total	351.7	227.9	243.4	333.0	326.3
-------	-------	-------	-------	-------	-------

PCMark05

Total	2747	2508	2589	2470	2672
-------	------	------	------	------	------

CPU	3188	2977	2581	2150	2983
-----	------	------	------	------	------

Memory	2821	2188	2015	2044	2712
--------	------	------	------	------	------

Graphics	2494	1787	2436	2931	2848
----------	------	------	------	------	------

HDD	2860	2630	2756	3251	2672
-----	------	------	------	------	------

Battery life

Hours	1:52	1:40	1:57	2:10	2:05
-------	------	------	------	------	------



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SD Secure Digital

MMC Multi Media Card
RS-MMC Reduced Size MMC



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KEEP IT SIMPLE

NOW THAT WE'VE BEEN introduced to Game Maker and have some understanding of the features available, it's time to create something. The smaller and simpler the game we decide to create at first, the better. You can't get much simpler than the mini-games in the Wario Ware titles, and there's been a Wario Ware inspired collaborative game project on the NAG Game.Dev forums called "Click!" for a couple of months now. Anyone can add to it, so we're going to join in and create our own little mini-game.

Wario Ware

FOR THOSE OF YOU who haven't played any of Nintendo's Wario Ware titles, the main concept behind the game is to play through a series of mini-games that are only six seconds long. As the player successfully completes each mini-game, they become faster or more difficult until the next level or area is unlocked. It sounds crazy (and it is), but it's still a lot of fun. Most of the enjoyment comes from the sheer wackiness of the things you need to do. A session will have you picking your nose, shaking a dog's paw, bouncing on a trampoline and chopping watermelons. Half of the challenge is trying not to laugh so hard that you can't push the buttons.

The controls are always very simple, so simple that the single word of 'instruction' you get at the start of the level is enough to tell you what to do. Click focuses on using only the mouse for input, colouring things that need a left click blue and using red to indicate a right click. We can also use the mouse position to intuitively control where things are on the screen.

Our game

THE ORIGINAL WARIO WARE designers kept their games simple by limiting each design to a picture on a stick-it note and a single word. In our design, "Stomp!" the player controls the horizontal position of an elephant's foot and clicks to stomp on the duck that's running left and right at the bottom of the screen. Difficulty levels could be added by making the duck require multiple stomps and/or adding hedgehogs that the elephant obviously doesn't want to stomp on... We told you the games were crazy.

Getting started

THE CLICK FRAMEWORK USES a feature of Game Maker that allows us to merge games easily. The idea is that many people can produce mini-games without having to wait for each other to finish. There's no file swapping or any of the

versioning problems typically associated with community-driven game projects. All that's produced is a .gm6 file that contains all the logic for a specific mini-game, and only that logic, nothing else, to allow for painless merging. This also means that the framework can be changed and cleaned up, provided it doesn't change how the mini-games are started.

Go ahead and extract the 'Click_Framework.zip' archive from this month's DVD. Open up 'Click.gm6' and run it. Click on the 'YourRoom' box or hit spacebar to play the YourRoom mini-game. Please note that it doesn't do much besides displaying "Word!" and lets you watch the timer ticking down. It's our job to put some game logic in there. Before doing anything, *save the file as something else!* We don't want to overwrite the framework each time we create a new game, so save it as 'Stomp.gm6' and let's get to work.

The first step would be to rename our room and change the instruction word that gets displayed. Double click on 'YourRoom' under 'Rooms' to open the 'Room Properties' window. Click the 'Settings' tab and change the room's name to 'StompDuck' (being descriptive always helps; this is the name that other people will see when merging our game). In the same tab, you'll see a button that says 'Creation Code'. Click it and bring up a code window. You'll see that it only says one thing: StartGame ("Word!"). All mini-games need this line in their creation code to run properly. The text between the inverted commas is the instruction word that gets displayed. Change it to say "Stomp!" That's the only code we need to touch to finish this game. Now that the hard part is over, we can continue to the actual gameplay.

The Elephant

CREATE A NEW OBJECT called Elephant and load Elephant.bmp as its sprite. Set the sprite's origin to X: 37, Y: 219. This is going to be the object that our player controls. For now, keep all your objects and sprites in their root folders. We're going to delete all the groups from these folders when our game is finished to make merging painless.

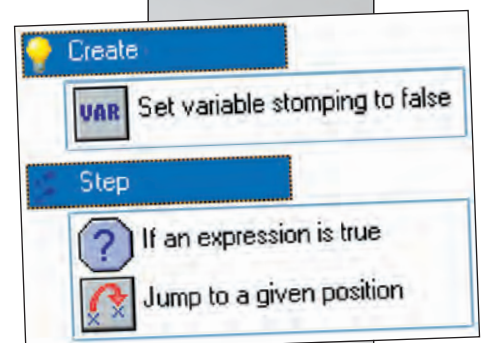
Our elephant leg has two states: stomping and not stomping. Give Elephant a 'Create' event and use a 'Set the value of a variable' action (from the control tab) to initialise the variable stomping to the value false. When the foot isn't stomping, we need it to move

ON THE NAG GAME.DEV FORUM

Competition 04 asked entrants to create either a turn-based or a puzzle game. The strong focus on simple rules evolving into complex gameplay led to some very enjoyable games being created.

The winning entry is a turn-based puzzle game that has you controlling an army of pest control agents trying to wipe out cockroach infestations over 15 challenging levels. Tr00jg's 'Roach Toaster' is on the Cover DVD this month - play it.

Speaking of the DVD, Ch1ppit has been hard at work on the game that won Competition 03, 'National Defense'. There's a new version this month, complete with sound, more levels, a save game system and a couple of bug fixes and interface tweaks. There have been rumours of extra-powerful weapon upgrades too!



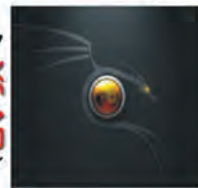


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horizontally to follow the mouse cursor. To do this, we use the 'Step' event to test if the stomping is not true using '**If an expression is true**' (control) with expression as stomping and not checked. We follow this action with a '**Jump to a given position**' (move) set to X: 'mouse_x' and Y: 32.

'Mouse_x' is a built-in variable that gives us the x position of the mouse cursor in the current room. 'Mouse_y' holds the y position if we were to need it. Add an Elephant object to the StompDuck room and run the game to see how the foot follows the cursor.

Making the foot stomp is a little more complex and is going to use multiple events. First we're going to need to use the 'Global Mouse -> Global Left Button' event to make the foot stomp when the player clicks the left mouse button. We use the same '**If an expression is true**' test that we used in the Step event to make sure that we only stomp if stomping is false. This time we have more than one action that needs to take place if the expression is true, so we use the '**Start/End of a block**' (control) actions to create a block of actions. In this block, we first set stomping to true using 'Set the value of a variable', then we use '**Set an alarm clock**' (main2) to set Alarm 0 to go off in three steps, followed by a '**Jump to a given position**' of X: x and Y: 200. The idea is to start a stomp, prevent the leg from following the mouse cursor or re-starting a stomp, moving to the stomping position and then setting Alarm 0 so that we can use it to move back to where the leg should be, after it's been stationary for three steps.

We said that we were going to use the Alarm 0 event to move the leg back up. In here we need a '**Move in the direction of a point**' (move) set to X: x, Y: 32 at a speed of 12. This sends the leg back upwards pretty fast, but doesn't stop it where we want it to stop. So we need to manually do something about it in 16 steps when it's in the right place. This means another '**Set an alarm clock**', this time setting Alarm 1 to go off in 16 steps.

Alarm 1's function is to stop the leg and signal that it's finished stomping. To do this, we simply '**Set the direction and speed of motion**' (move) both to 0 and use '**Set the value of a variable**' to set stomping back to false.

The Duck

THE DUCK'S FUNCTION IS to 'run' left and right across the bottom of the screen to give our player something to stomp on. Create a new object, name it Duck, set it's depth to 10 and load Duck.bmp as its sprite. Create another sprite

by loading DuckFlat.bmp and set the origins of both Duck-bearing sprites to 29, 69. We don't want the duck to be 100% predictable, so we're going to use the '**random()**' function quite a bit. Its Create event makes it start in a random position by using '**Set the value of a variable**' to set x to '**random(200) + 60**'. We're also going to want our duck to randomly change speed and direction sometimes, so we set Alarm 0 to 1 as well.

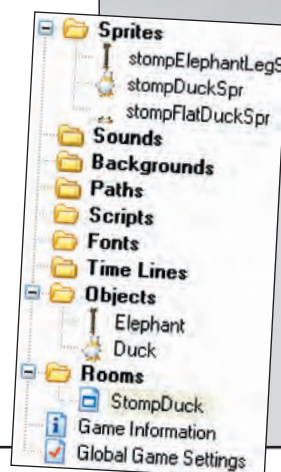
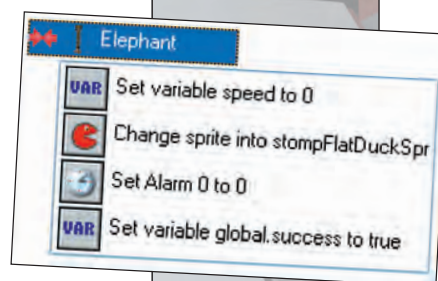
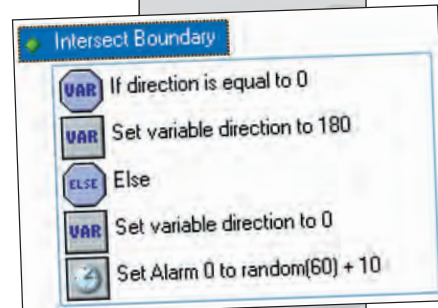
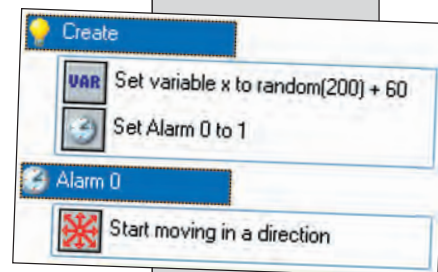
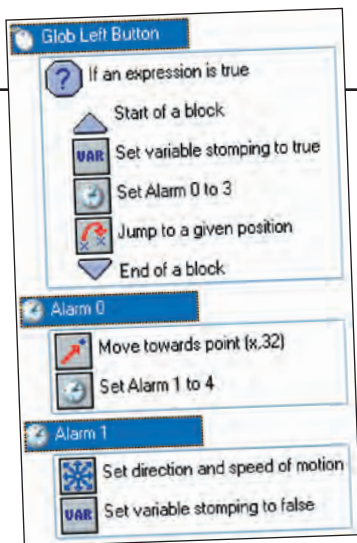
Alarm 0 tells the duck to '**Start moving in a direction**' (move) with a speed of '**random(4) + 2**'. If we click the arrows that point left and right, Game Maker will pick one of those directions each time the alarm is triggered. We also need to make sure that the duck doesn't leave the screen, so we use the 'Other -> Intersect Boundary' event to change the direction it's moving in: **if variable direction has a value 0, set the value of a variable direction to 180**, else, set the value of a variable direction to 0. We also make use of our random duck behaviour generator by using '**Set an alarm clock**' to trigger Alarm 0 after '**random(60) + 10**' steps.

Finally, the duck has to react to being stepped on. This is handled by a 'Collision event with Elephant'. We '**Set the value of a variable**' speed to 0 to make the duck stop moving, Change the sprite to the flattened duck sprite, stop the random movement by setting Alarm 0 to 0 and '**Set the value of a variable**' to let the framework know that the player won the mini-game by setting '**global.success**' to true. Global variables exist for the entire game, so when the StompDuck room ends and switches back to the framework's room, '**global.success**' holds the result of the game. It defaults to false so you don't have to worry about logic to make the player lose.

Finishing up

THE LAST THING WE need to do is delete everything that we didn't create. This breaks the game if it's run on its own, but allows us to merge it with the framework easily. Go ahead and delete everything that's in a Click folder, then save the game. Load 'ClickTest.gm6' and use 'File -> Merge' and merge in 'StompDuck.gm6'. See how it imports everything we created in "StompDuck" folders? You can now play Stomp with all the other mini-games that people have created so far.

Now create your own mini-game and submit it on the forums. Enjoy! **NAG**



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LAZY GAMER'S GUIDE

THE REVOLUTION CONTROLLER

OH NINTENDO, YOU WACKY company you. First you confuse the world with your NES controller and its D-pad design, throwing away the 'tried and true' Atari joystick design. Then you confound gamers with your analogue stick on the N64 controller, the design becoming an industry standard years later. You also raised eyebrows by throwing a stylus onto a handheld gaming system, your wacky attitude towards innovation in gameplay both the mirth and bane of industry watchdogs and consumers alike.

But now, now you've gone and done something really balmy. Oh Nintendo, where will your hi-jinx end? *[Who wrote this? Ed]*



All sarcasm aside, Nintendo has time and again created products that initially seemed arbitrary but eventually either became critically acclaimed or actual standards used industry wide. They kept the controller for their upcoming console, the Revolution, secret for as long as possible with trite remarks of "It's so good, we don't want anyone to steal our idea". And so, when they finally released the design for the controller it was met with a general what-the-hell attitude. After all, it looks like a TV-remote. And a TV-remote doesn't look anything like the standard dual-analogue controller, so it must be bad, right?

Absolutely wrong, actually. The trick to the Revolution controller, aside from its friendly and recognisable TV-remote appearance, is in its gyroscopic sensing nature. The Revolution controller can accurately sense where it is in the real world, which way it is tilted and/or pointed, as well as its general relative tilt and position in respect to the Revolution console itself.

What this means in a nutshell, is that the Revolution controller is about as interactive as you can get, an all-in-one peripheral controller only limited by the imaginations of developers. Games can utilise the Revolution controller's gyro-sense to accurately interface with it as if it were a sword, or a fishing rod. Two Revolution controllers could even be used as virtual drumsticks, hitting air in the real world but virtual drums inside the game.

It's all crazy and new, yet actually it's just Nintendo taking cues from existing successful markets. Peripheral-based games are not a new thing and in the East they're successful beyond comprehension. Nintendo has decided to forge its own market with the Revolution controller, instead of competing head-on with Sony and Microsoft. Whereas Sony and Microsoft are still only appealing to the casual gamer or hardcore enthusiast, Nintendo are reaching out to everyone else. It looks like a TV-remote, because that's the easiest and most recognisable shape to the common man, woman or child. The expansion port at the bottom of the controller allows other devices to be plugged in, such as the bundled 'puck' which contains a standard analogue controller.

Only time will tell if developers will make use of its innovative features, but for now it's fun to speculate on what it might be used for, or muse over already working examples. **NAG**



WHAT IT'S GOOD FOR (USES FOR THE REVOLUTION CONTROLLER)

FISHING ROD: Just a flick of the wrist and you can tell your friends about the one that got away.

SWORD: Medieval games might never be the same again as the controller can perfectly mimic a real sword. Hack-an-slash might become a lot more realistic.

LIGHT SABRE: We just know that George Lucas is already salivating at the possibilities of using the Revolution controller to let gamers be a 'real' Jedi.

FLASHLIGHT: Survival horror games can use the Revolution controller as a virtual flashlight - where you point the controller is where the beam of light will go.

FLY SWATTER: Perhaps the most mundane idea, yet highly simplistic. Swat flies in a party-game, or something.

CONDUCTOR'S BATON: Direct music in a rhythm-game. How you swing the controller around influences the music.

CHOPPING KNIFE: Learn how to cook by chopping, perhaps even flipping pancakes onscreen by flicking the controller.

AIRPLANE: Hold the controller like a toy airplane and the virtual plane on the screen will mimic it perfectly.

MAGNIFYING GLASS: Where's Waldo style games will benefit from being able to quickly move around the screen and zoom in and out by moving the Revolution controller towards and away from the TV.

LIGHT GUN: The Revolution controller can mimic a light gun easily - its accuracy pinpoint enough.

MOUSE CURSOR: We might see a proper RTS on the Revolution, as the controller can emulate a mouse cursor to pixel-precision.

STEERING WHEEL: Hold it like a steering wheel, and it becomes one. That's the power of gyro-sensing, baby!

STREET FIGHTER ALPHA GENERATIONS

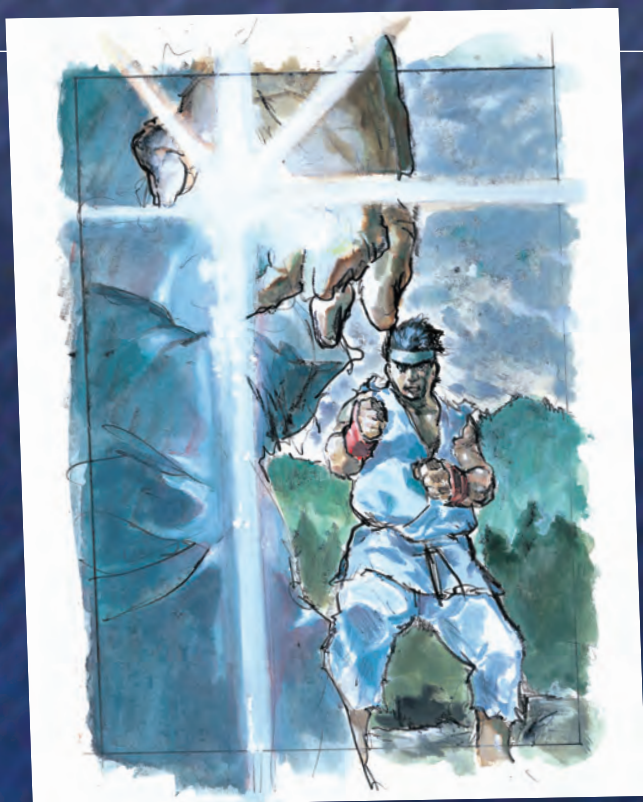
The Return of the Classic Martial Arts Anime

IT'S BEEN FIVE YEARS since the last movie outing for the Street Fighter series and it is about time for another. Ryu, Ken, Gouki and Sakura return in the thrilling prequel to Street Fighter Alpha, Street Fighter Alpha Generations.

Street Fighter's origin actually doesn't lie in anime, but in the revolutionary videogame which was released in 1987 by Capcom with the same name. At the time it wasn't really popular compared to titles like Barbarian and Double Dragon, but when Yoshiki Okamoto (Final Flight) was given the task of creating Street Fighter 2, it became one of the most famous fighting games ever.

With Japan's gaming culture and anime culture literally almost being one, creating a game based on a successful anime or an anime based on a successful game has almost become an industry standard. Who wouldn't love to play a game featuring your favourite anime characters or watch an anime bringing your game characters to life?

In 1995, Street Fighter - The Movie (SFTM) was released by Manga Entertainment in the USA. The story featured Bison, head of the nefarious criminal organisation Shadowlaw, turning the world upside down in his search to find the world's top martial artists. After capturing the best martial



artists, he would brainwash them and use them to do his bidding in support of his evil plans. When he heard of Ryu, a fighter of unmatched skills, he made it his ultimate goal to capture and subdue him. However, Ryu turned out to be far more dangerous than Bison had anticipated.

SFTM featured numerous amazing fight scenes with one of the highlights being the amazing close-quarters combat scene between Chun-Li and Vega inside Chun-Li's apartment. And this wasn't only because Chun-Li was half dressed, but because of the excellent fight choreography and well-timed soundtrack.

In 2002, Manga Entertainment released Street Fighter Alpha. The mysterious death of their master reunited Ken and Ryu's under distressing circumstances. To make matters worse, Ryu, the current Street Fighter champion, was also being threatened by dark energies growing inside him. He was being challenged by the 'Dark Hadou' - the dark power which had consumed Akuma, the brother of his sensei, Gouken.

While he was being emotionally worn out, Ryu's was unexpectedly confronted with the appearance of a boy named Shun, claiming to be the long-lost brother he never knew.

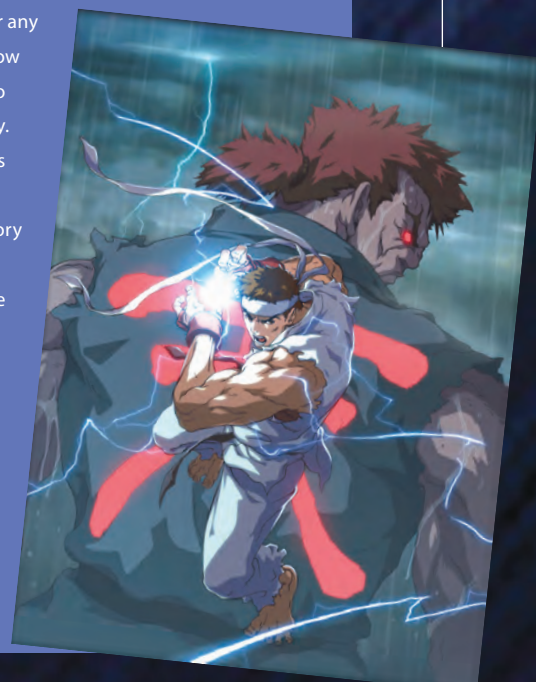
When Shun entered a martial arts competition and manifested the same fearsome 'Dark Hadou', he felt a closer connection with the boy. But before Ryu had the chance to consider whether Shun's timely appearance might have been more than a coincidence, agents of the insidious Shadowlaw organisation appeared and kidnapped the boy. To recover Shun, Ryu undertook the ultimate journey of self-discovery

and learned to control the power which threatened to consume him and confronted Akuma - the vicious lord of the Dark Hadou himself.

Generations is the prequel to Street Fighter Alpha and offers quite a bit of history on some of the popular characters. You will learn more about Akuma and his connection with Ryu.

Ryu returns home to pay his respects to his deceased master, but he is disturbed by images of the killer. Seeking to become a true martial arts master and rid himself of the Dark Hadou, Ryu begins a quest to sharpen his skills. But for any martial artist to truly know his capabilities, he has to face his strongest enemy. And in Ryu's case, it is his arch-enemy Gouki.

If you look at the history of martial arts anime, you can't help but notice the high production quality of the Street Fighter movies. Compared to other fighting anime, there is more to the series than just fighting. It is all about personal growth. **NAG**



THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY



TAKE A BOOK FEW people really understood, an answer to a question nobody will ever get, liberally mix it with a bit of Monty Python, some irritating acting (by Sam Rockwell as Galactic President Zaphod Beeblebrox), mix everything together and produce a film about said book. Not just any film, a film which seems as if it had been produced by some unknown South

African production team high on Pan Galactic Gargleblasters and low on budget. The end result is a mediocre attempt at reproducing Douglas Adams' masterpiece for the big screen. The plot, although loosely based on Adams' book, is weak. The acting is below-par and so much more was expected of this film. But, Don't Panic! You don't have to watch it. If you do, at least Marvin, the manic depressive robot, gives a decent enough performance. Expect The Hitchhiker's Guide to clean up at this year's Razzie Awards.

BATMAN BEGINS



BATMAN BEGINS TELLS THE tale of how young Bruce Wayne lost his parents, travelled the world in search of something to give him meaning in life, and how he ends up with his mentor. He is taught all the tricks in the book (fighting, stealth, controlling his emotions and some other tricks) and goes back to Gotham City. Gotham is a city out of control – not unlike current Johannesburg. It's dark,

the city is in serious decay, the cops are corrupt, the justice system is just an excuse to use the word justice, and corporate big-brass is in the employ of criminals. Batman Begins also tells the story of how Batman becomes Batman. Batman is not the dashing, women conquering Batman portrayed in previous Batman films. Batman is out for revenge; his character is dark and deep, a welcome relief from all the previous lame attempts of creating a good Batman film. Batman Begins is the definitive Batman film. The acting is outstanding: from Christian Bale (as Batman) to Michael Cane (the man can never give a bad performance, even if he tries) and Morgan Freeman. Batman Begins was directed by Christopher Nolan and he directed a stunner.



JAMIROQUAI: Dynamite

DYNAMITE IS THE SIXTH full-length studio album effort from London-bred outfit, Jamiroquai. And after a sabbatical of almost four years, it marks the group's return to the mainstream. The group has sold in excess of 20 million copies of their previous albums, and Dynamite was much anticipated by fans. But, unfortunately Dynamite doesn't live up to the hype, hope and anticipation. The album is a collection of irritating, all-sounding-the-same nonsensical songs about Mr. Jay driving fast cars and drinking wine. It's a sad day for a Mr. Jay fan to receive a brand new album, only to fast-forward between tracks, hoping to get to the final track as quick as possible. It leaves a bitter taste in the mouth. Mr. Jay is unfortunately past his sell-by date and should really consider going for an audition for 'The Cat in the Hat'. Jay already has all the hats needed to make a good impression.

This is a limp album, should be avoided and should have been named 'Implosion'.

FOO FIGHTERS: In Your Honor

STEPHEN ERLEWINE, A RENOWNED music critic, probably said it best when he claimed that, "Although it was as big a commercial success as the Foo Fighters' three previous albums, 2002's One by One seemed flat and tired, as if their leader, Dave Grohl, had reached a song writing slump or as if the band had exhausted its possibilities. The time was ripe for a reinvention." Well, reinvent themselves the Foo Fighters have, hitting back with their latest offering, 'In Your Honor'. It is a double CD set featuring 20 songs. The first CD is pure Foo Fighters (it states on a label on the front of the CD jewel case that the first CD is loud, and the second is not so loud). It features such hits as 'In Your Honor', 'DOA', and others, all performed with the 'reinvented', albeit the old (depending on your point of view), Foo Fighters zest. The second CD is more mellow, subdued and hushed and features acoustic recordings by guest stars, including several appearances by Led Zeppelin's John Paul Jones, and a duet with Norah Jones on 'Virginia Moon'.

All-in-all, this 'reinvention' album is a gem and a must-have for any Foo Fighters fan.

Marilyn Manson: Guns, God and Government World Tour

WHILE THIS UMD IS nothing more than a direct re-release of the original Guns, God and Government World Tour DVD, it is still an excellent compilation of footage from the tour and worth its salt to any fan of the androgynous entertainer.

The seventeen songs contain a variety of footage from the various tour stops, mixed together to give you a wide overview of the entire tour on an almost per-song basis. To quote Manson himself: "This will help you see what it's like to be nailed to this wrecking ball". The spotlights throughout the song show what has made Manson so famous in the US, Europe, Japan and Russia.

The best feature of the UMD however, is the 30 minute bonus feature titled 'The Death's Parade'. Essentially a short film about the band's last trip around the world, it's a rollercoaster behind the scenes look at Manson and his crew. While not filmed in an aspect suited to the PSP, it still manages to be a captivating clip that will have you glued to Manson's shoulder as you experience his performance life from Tokyo to Berlin, Moscow to Rome, London to New York and everywhere in-between.

The sound on the UMD rivals that of the original DVD. The menus do a great job of letting you get to the songs or content you want with minimum fuss.



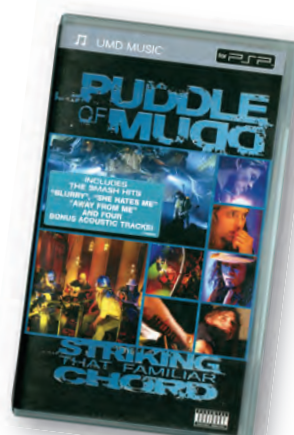
Puddle of Mudd: Striking That Familiar Chord

YET ANOTHER QUICK DVD to UMD conversion, this Puddle of Mudd compilation showcases most of their greatest hits, including 'Blurry', 'She Hates Me' and 'Away From Me'.

All the songs are recorded in glorious 5.1 surround sound - a nice touch, especially if you are a Puddle of Mudd fan. Included on the UMD is a bonus acoustic set of most of the songs, filmed in the days leading up to their Key Club concert. The package also includes an interview with the band and details some of the stories that led to the creation of some of their top hits.

Overall, Striking That Familiar Chord is a reasonable UMD (with no noticeable deviation from the original DVD release, other than slightly lower image quality), made for fans of the band. Newcomers to Puddle of Mudd's music might find their sombre honest tones appealing, but may not stick around in the long run due to their lack of variety in tonality and subject matter.

If you already own the original DVD, then there is no real reason to get the UMD other than if you want Puddle of Mudd portability on your PSP.



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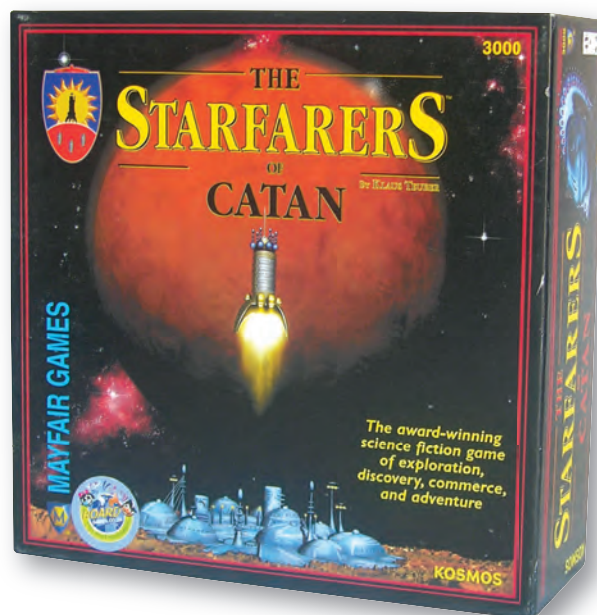
The Starfarers of Catan

Price: R550 | www.boardgames.co.za

THE STARFARERS OF CATAN takes the very successful Catan franchise into space in a challenging strategy game with loads of bling that is aimed at three or four players. Unlike Settlers, there is a fixed game board - the galaxy - with players starting from a base - a fixed position - and expanding into the unknown universe. During this journey of exploration they will build colonies, space stations, outposts, transporters and expand their mother ship with additional weapons, boosters and extra freight areas. Space Pirates and a lightweight decision tree, using cards, present additional challenges that need to be overcome during the game.

The most innovative part of the game is the plastic mother ship (a giant spaceship) that each player uses to not only show enhancements and improvements, but also doubles as a random result generator. Coloured balls are contained in the body of the mother ship. When a result is required, the ship is shaken until two balls drop into a clear container. The colour combination that is generated dictates the actual result. Very clever, although games tend to resemble the noise levels of a group of crazed babies armed with rattles. Another downfall of the mother ship is that some pieces are a bit brittle and prone to snap under non-gentle usage.

Starfarers of Catan is a very good looking game. Once the board is



set up, the over 100 plastic bits and pieces make the game a visual feast (no wooden blocks in this game). If you enjoyed Settlers of Catan or love strategy games that focus on exploration and commerce, take a look at The Starfarers of Catan.

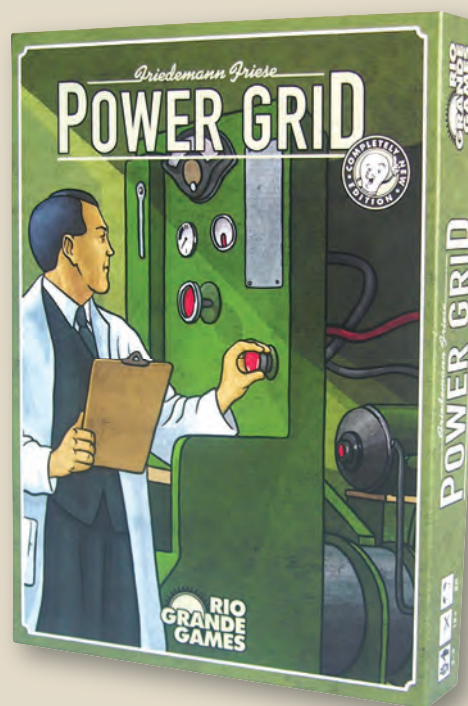
Power Grid

Price: R310 | www.boardgames.co.za

POWER GRID IS A strategy game that focuses on companies having to build power stations and connect cities to their power grid. Once a player connects up seventeen cities, the game ends with the winner being the player who can supply power to most of the cities in his or her power grid. Sound exciting? At its core the game is about the careful management of resources, income and expenditure to make decisions with regards to cost and when, where and how to connect up cities.

Power Grid is aimed at between two and six players. To cover both the European and US markets the game board itself is double-sided, with a map of Europe on the one side and the USA on the other with both areas presenting their own challenges. The game box is filled with the board, rulebook, power plant cards, (fake) money and the now obligatory wooden blocks found in most Euro-games.

During a turn, players will have to buy new plants using a lightweight bidding mechanism, manage their limited set of power plants, purchase resources and expand the power grid by hooking up new cities and paying the associated cost. Each turn ends with a very applicable phase, the bureaucracy phase, where a player has to decide which cities to provide power to and thus how much income will be generated. Power plants and resources are also made available for the next round.



If you like games with a healthy mix of strategy and economics, abhor luck and want all players to participate until the end of the game, Power Grid must rank high on your list.

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GAME OVER

BADGER HUNT

EACH MONTH WE CHOOSE a cunning hiding place in the magazine for our badger friend [this might be in a screenshot, on a piece of artwork, the cover or anywhere really]. Your job is to find him and let us know you have! We'll announce a random winner each month, but we don't have a sponsor for this competition yet. So all you'll get for your effort is a pat on the back and your name up in lights. Send your badger spotting to this address [ed@nag.co.za] with the subject line [November Badger].



October Badger Hunt winner [p62]: Jonathan Hudson

CAPTION OF THE MONTH

EVERY MONTH we'll choose a boring, odd or peculiar screenshot from any random game and write a bad caption for it. Your job is to come up with a better [funny] caption. The winner will get a free game from Vivendi Universal Games. Send your captions to [ed@nag.co.za] with the subject [November Caption].

RULES: (1) If you don't use the correct subject line, your mail will be automatically filtered by our spam software and deleted. (2) If you think sending in 20 captions for the same screenshot is how you want to play the system, then put them all in the same mail or we'll keep the top one and delete the rest. You probably won't win anyway because you can't follow simple instructions. And people who can't follow simple instructions don't deserve to win things.

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October Winner

"The Undead Rights activist protests against 'The Zombie Survival Guide' being released at the bookshop." - Hyslop



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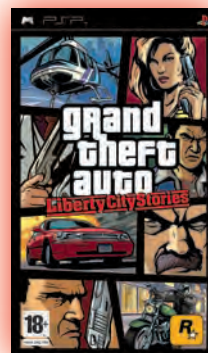
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